Impact of Social Constructs on Administrator Understanding of Social Justice

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Abstract

Educational administrators are expected to relate social justice considerations to their actions and to the theoretical foundations of their practice. At the same time, social constructs—including those related to administrative practice, social justice, and societal norms—are important in helping administrators understand, frame, and describe administrative issues. Furthermore, as part of socially constructed language, these constructs represent discursive practices and accepted ways of knowing, valuing, and experiencing the world. Drawing on the multidimensional methods of critical discourse analysis as articulated in the writings of Michel Foucault, Norman Fairclough, and Allan Luke, and using deconstruction as a strategic device for reading and interpreting texts, this exploratory qualitative study examined how administrator knowledge, values, and experiences impact their understanding of social justice within the context of delivering social justice for students who experience bullying. Study findings reveal that school administrators interpreted social justice as equitable distribution, action, and results; fairness; and equity. Constructs embedded in these interpretations assumed common things such as universal acceptance of norms of social relations and conveyed administrator intent to secure the kind of social relations that enabled individuals to enjoy greater equality within existing social arrangements.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This is a study of the impact of social constructs on administrator understanding of social justice. Specifically, this qualitative study explored how school administrators' ways of knowing, valuing, and relating influenced their understanding of social justice.

Many knowledge regimes influence administrative practice. At the same time, educational leadership encompasses many roles and functions. Key among those roles is ensuring that students get the intended benefits of their education. Relating administrative practice constructs to social justice, Fraser (1989) contends that educational leadership within a social justice framework implies a shared task of critique and vision, carries a responsibility to relate social justice considerations to individual actions and to the theoretical foundations of administrative practice, and advocates for a civic and moral education that leads to both self-knowledge and community awareness. Fullan (2003) also proposes an educational leadership derived from moral action in order to (a) make a difference in the lives of students; (b) reduce the gaps between high and low performers; (c) reduce gaps in perception in the community; and (d) transform the environment so as to encourage commitment, engagement, and leadership.

The presumed role that leaders play in the delivery of social justice has gained prominence through increasing emphasis on training educational leaders to deliver social justice (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Hafner, 2005; Mckenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Rusch, 2004). However, various researchers indicate that most leadership preparation programs are inadequate, conservative, and lack equity focus (Marshall, 2004; Rusch, 2004; Theoharis, 2004). This study was intended to advance the existing

knowledge base by examining leader assumptions, theoretical frames, and actions when responding to value-laden issues of administrative practice, such as the case of bullying.

Research Problem

Social justice and leadership narratives are knowledge and social-construct contingent. Inherently they are political and undergo constant (re)construction. Furthermore, the current context of educational leadership has

> Brought additional demands to balance the needs of communities of varied cultures with an educational program of common learning and common political ideals....While these challenges are daunting enough, they appear to be challenges to an institution whose intrinsic structures and institutional cultures are taken too much at face value, as though the structures and cultures themselves are not problematic. (Starratt, 2004, p. 1)

Consequently, educational leaders are faced with the task of making conscious adaptations to their practice in order to meet many competing demands and to address complex issues.

Educational leaders also operate in an environment where a gap exists between the theory that informs their practice and the realities they face in the field. This gap can be traced to educational leadership preparation programs in which

> Issues that school leaders face tend to be presented and interpreted primarily as technical problems resolvable by technical, rational solutions. Yet, the human, civic and moral challenges nested in many of these problems are nothing but technical or rational. (Starratt, 2004, p. 4)

In this study, the research problem is framed around multiple discourses that enable individuals to generate meaning in everyday social contexts. According to Fairclough (1992), discourse is seen as a "discursive practice" and a "social practice" (p. 4). Elaborating, van Dijk (1997) posits,

> Discursive practice pertains to ways discourse is created and interpreted in the course of interaction. This perspective is especially important for analyzing conversations but in general it can be said that all kinds of discourse can (and should) be interpreted as interactions.... Discourse is primarily taken as a specific form of social interaction, and not just as an 'abstracted' or 'produced' result of such interaction.... This is particularly obvious in face-to-face verbal interaction but, also holds for the production of written discourse forms. (p. 32)

Conversely, discourse as a "social practice" constitutes the principal element of discourse that "shapes the nature of discursive practice, and the constitutive effects of discourse" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 4). In this instance, discourse frames what individuals understand, value, and act.

Therefore, this study makes a case for the importance of understanding the connection between social justice, administrative practice, and the theories that shape their meaning or that are shaped by generated meaning. Similarly, since educational leaders are constantly called upon to (re)frame their actions as part of their daily functions, the research problem is framed around the importance for educational leaders to connect theory and practice to their day-to-day functions (Larson & Murtadha, 2002) and to understand the serious human consequences presented in administrative practice (Starratt, 2004).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how administrators' ways of knowing, valuing, and relating influenced their understanding of social justice. Implicitly, the study sought to provide insights on whether administrators critically analyzed taken-for-granted assumptions, and the extent to which administrators questioned how interactions, decisions, and processes highlighted administrative allocation of values (Easton, 1965, as cited in Lopez, 2003). An exploration of this aspect of administrator practice adds to the body of knowledge that builds understanding regarding the relationship between social constructs and administrator understanding of social justice.

The research drew on critical theory perspectives. Thus, another overarching purpose of the study was to initiate the kind of conversations that encourage administrators to analyze how they negotiated and reconfigured dominant social justice narratives in daily practices.

Research Questions

The relationship between social constructs and administrator understanding of social justice was explored through the following empirical questions:

- How do administrators construct individuals and groups involved in complex administrative issues, such as bullying?
- How do administrators construct relationships when dealing with complex administrative issues?
- How do administrators construct administrative practices and social justice narratives associated with complex administrative issues?

- How do these various constructions shape administrators' understandings of and practices associated with social justice?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is situated within critical approaches to discourse (as espoused by Fairclough, 1992, 1995; Foucault, 1969/1972; Freire, 1970/1990; Luke, 1995; van Dijk, 1993) and the discursive nature of experience and relationships (as espoused by Fine & Weis, 2004; Fraser, 1989; Young, 1990). These approaches are concerned with order of subordination, form of subordination, remedy for justice, aspects of social justice, and delivery of social justice. Within these broad concepts, the study draws from Fraser's (1995, 2000) and Fraser and Honneth's (2003) two-dimensional model of social justice, which incorporates both recognition and distribution paradigms. According to Gingrich (2006), such an approach represents two distinct perspectives, since neither of the paradigms can be reduced to the other because of the existence of both class structure and status order in social settings. Specifically, the principle of distribution of benefits, resources, and opportunities requires educational institutions to take into account the nature of what they are achieving through their actions. The principle of recognition compels educational institutions to take into account who benefits, who participates, who is represented, and who is excluded.

In embracing both distributive and recognition paradigms as well as paying attention to advocacy and alternative ways of reconfiguring practices, this theoretical approach uses deconstruction as a strategy for considering the values and policies that pervade education and for asking critical questions about how conventional administrative practices are structured. At the same time, this approach pays particular

attention to both intersubjective subordination and misrecognition associated with social status order and inequality that accompanies objective subordination associated with maldistribution of resources (Gingrich, 2006).

Underpinning this research study is the belief that educational leaders have a responsibility for the delivery of social justice. Thus, key aspects of this theoretical framework draw upon Foucault's (1969/1972) and Freire's (1970/1990) works on the purpose of education as well as Foster's (1989), Heifetz's (1984), and Fullan's (2001) works on educational leadership within a social justice framework. The study also applies Rawls's (1971), Fraser's (1989), Young's (1990), and Honneth's (Fraser & Honneth, 2003) theories to unravel assumptions and theoretical frameworks that undergird social justice practices. Finally, the study borrows from Foucault's (1969/1972), Luke's (1995), van Dijk's (1987, 1993, 2001), and Fairclough's (1995) concepts and ideas regarding discourse as constructive phenomena, and Balkin's (1996), Derrida's (1967/1976), and Faulconer's (1998) ideas regarding deconstruction. These works advocate for research positions that examine how written texts and discourses as constructive phenomena shape practices of human subjects in various relations of power and knowledge. Thus, the writings provide a framework for describing how social constructs not only represent discursive practices and accepted ways of knowing, valuing, and experiencing the world, but also how they influence understanding of social justice.

Assumptions Underlying the Study

This study was undertaken in the belief that most school administrators are interested in reflecting on their practices in order to understand how their actions address educational issues. Therefore, the research benefits practicing administrators by

providing an opportunity to deepen their knowledge of how individual ways of knowing, valuing, and relating impact social justice understanding.

The desire to undertake critical research on topics as vast as social justice, leadership, and social constructions is influenced by experiences of both justice and injustice (Fine & Weis, 2004) and my activist need to enact social justice. Further, the attempt to link social justice and administrative practice is deliberate and grounded in my belief that educational administrators have a role to play in creating just systems, in modeling social justice in their practice, and in creating spaces for social justice discourse that increase democracy in complex and pluralist educational situations.

Similarly, because the study has a transformative agenda, it was undertaken in the belief that, when administrators make conscious connections between their perceptions, relationships, and values, or when they undertake a critical reflection of their practice, they invariably (re)consider how their actions address issues in schools. According to Horkheimer (1972), critical research is never satisfied with simply increasing knowledge. It is political in the sense that it has a transformative agenda (Grek, 2005). Kincheloe and McLaren (1994), for example, argue that critical researchers enter into an investigation with their assumptions on the table, so no one is confused concerning the epistemological and political baggage they bring with them to the research site. Concurring, Luke (1995) indicates that, as an epistemological stance, critical research uses methods that can offer a critique of an agent's understanding, an explanation of the reasons for that understanding continuing to be employed, and possibly an alternative interpretation of the agent's conceptual frames in an environment that is highly contested and where individual identities are socially constructed. Foucault (1969/1972) maintains that, when used as an

epistemological foundation, results from such studies contribute to critical education aimed at understanding taken-for-granted "truths" that "systematically form" the objects people freely talk about (p. 49).

While some may call it an obsession with leveling the playing field, my use of a social justice lens to understand educational administration practices stems from a personal conviction that inequality manifested in the social, economic, and political fabric of society is partly rooted in education. Specifically, it is rooted in educational practices that favour dominant ways of knowing. It is also rooted in discursive practices that fail to question how assumptions, beliefs, values, and ideologies in education influence society in general. In sum, my orientation to this form of inquiry is guided by a desire to ensure that education contributes to a just world and is influenced by similarities between the values of critical research; the principles of social justice, democracy, and freedom; and my actions as a social justice activist.

Study Significance

Little literature exists that examines the impact of social constructs on administrator understanding of social justice. The study addressed this gap in literature. Because the study was undertaken in the belief that most school administrators would be interested in reflecting on their practices, the implicit assumption was that, by making conscious connections between administrator perceptions, relationships, values, and understandings, the results from this study could encourage school administrators to envision new ways of understanding, participating in, and restructuring practices, relationships, and values in order to effectively address social justice issues. Similarly, the study provided school principals with an opportunity to gain insights into their

administrative practice through analysis and reflection on practice, and provided an opportunity to contribute meaningful information that may be used in the development of strategies for addressing social justice problems in schools.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The research was confined to a small group size (3 participants), implying that the results cannot be applied to the general population. While the use of a qualitative research methodology excels at bringing an understanding of a complex issue (Creswell, 2005), the use of critical incidents identified by the study participants and the focus on understanding participant meanings in a contextual and bounded setting offers only a subjective picture of educational situations rather than a detailed analysis. Therefore, conclusions from the study are suggestive of possible impacts of social constructs on administrator understanding of social justice. The study is neither exhaustive nor applicable in all educational situations.

Organization of the Report

The report is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study and provides an overview of the tools used in conducting the study, purpose of the study, research questions, assumptions, significance, and scope of the investigation. The chapter also presents the theoretical grounding of the study. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature that informed the study, including existing research related to study topic. The chapter attempts to show relations between individual ways of knowing, valuing, and relating and understandings of social justice. This link between social constructs and discursive practices underscores the importance of the study.

Chapter 3 presents the research methodology and explains the rationale for choosing an exploratory qualitative approach in this study. Deconstruction is presented as a tool for analyzing study data. Use of interviews as a data collection tool is discussed, and choices of research methods are explained.

Chapter 4 presents research findings whereas chapter 5 discusses and analyzes the findings. An argument that resonates in both of these chapters is that without understanding theoretical frameworks that inform practice and without interrogating individual practice, it is possible that, in an attempt to deliver social justice, individual actions may contribute to maintaining existing social relationships. Chapter 5 concludes by exploring the implications for administrative practice and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter examines concepts surrounding social justice, leadership, and social constructs. Starting with an overview of the current literature on social justice and school leadership, the review reveals a plethora of studies that can be divided into two major clusters. One cluster of studies examines the theme of social justice and how it intersects with educational practices. These studies indicate that, in the last 15 years, social justice has emerged as a dominant discourse in the context of educational leadership and in the preparation of educational leaders to deliver social justice. Within this literature base, social justice is primarily interpreted as being about (re)distribution of rights, opportunities, and resources that arise from social cooperation in ways that ensure equal opportunities and equal outcomes (Barry, 1989). The literature also includes studies that raise questions regarding the effectiveness of distributive justice as opposed to other conceptions of social justice.

The second cluster of studies has twin foci of *leadership* and *social justice*. A review of this cluster of studies reveals three strands of literature. According to Larson and Murtadha (2002), these include "(a) deconstructing existing logics of leadership; (b) portraying alternative perspectives on leadership; and (c) constructing theories, systems, and processes of leadership for social justice" (p. 137). These strands of literature also position educational leaders as key actors, with an important role in ensuring that education delivers on its promises to all students equally (Foster, 1989; Fullan, 2003).

Finally, a complementary literature base related to social constructions is drawn mainly from the fields of psychology and sociology. In this literature base, social constructs are defined as mental representations that become habituated into reciprocal

roles played by individuals in relation to each other. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), over time, these roles are institutionalized and their meanings become embedded in society, thereby constructing the social realities that individuals have to abide by. Similarly, social constructs are "characterized by intersubjectivity" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 25) and represent "the sum total of "what everybody knows" about the social world, an assemblage of maxims, morals, proverbial nuggets of wisdom, values and beliefs, and so forth" (p. 65). These studies also reveal that concepts around social constructs have a long history in the social sciences and are frequently used in social science theory. However, there is scant literature that systematically analyzes how socially constructed language, power, and ideology, as constructive phenomena, shape practices of educational leaders. Similarly, while terminologies related to social constructs are rarely defined, social constructs play an important role in guiding actions of people and influencing underlying structure in the society (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 2000; Jary & Jary, 1991).

Specifically, this chapter outlines the broad themes of social justice, leadership, and social constructions. The review of literature starts by presenting a brief analysis of social justice theoretical frameworks, with a specific focus on distributive justice and its associational aspects, including challenges associated with the distributive paradigm. The review of literature also critically examines the intersection of leadership and social justice by sketching concepts around leadership and challenges associated with administrative constructs that expect school leaders to deliver social justice. The literature review concludes by examining the issue of social constructs, including how social constructs impact individuals and social relations in society.

Social Justice Concepts and Interpretations

Justice is viewed as a central concept in social and political structures even though its conceptions are diverse (Murphy, 1999). McInerney (2004) argues that not only is the notion of social justice a contested one, but also that it coexists with a range of ideas and expressions about equality, fairness, and human rights. Similarly, interpretations of social justice have sought to establish some universal principles of justice. For example, Rawls (1971) posits that "justice is the first virtue of social institutions" (p. 3). Drawing on Rawls's concepts, Barry (1989) relates social justice to the "basic structure of a society or the way in which major social institutions distribute rights, opportunities and resources that arise from social cooperation" (p. 16).

As a moral notion, the concept of distributive justice, which was founded by the ancient Greeks and applied by the Romans, has become the norm to regulate our society (Rawls, 1971). This conception, sometimes referred to as the Rawlsian theory of distributive justice, revolves around equal opportunity and forms the basis for individuals to criticize norms of practices and institutions that systematically advantage members of the dominant group. Three general ideas can be inferred from Rawls's theory of distributive justice. One, distributive justice can be promoted through structural reform of the society. Two, justice is a compromise between persons of equal power who would enforce their will on each other if they could. Three, justice is a collective responsibility. Consequently, this theory of distributive justice proposes a social contract based on what is believed to be a fair distribution of rights, opportunities, and resources. Barry (1989) provides the following additional glimpses into this conceptual framework: "justice is all about the kinds of social arrangements that can be defended politically, socially and

economically" (p. 3); and "justice as impartiality depends on atomistic sociological premises, such as presupposing that human beings can develop outside of any culture/social matrix" (p. 125).

Other authors focus on specific interpretations and principles of social justice. These conceptions of social justice include Miller's (1999) representation of social justice as a "fair distribution among the members of the human society of both the good and bad things in life" (p. 1). Miller also talks about social equality, which he characterizes as "independent justice" (p. 239). Goodman (2001) argues that social justice examines the individual and interpersonal dynamics and addresses issues of equity, power relations, and institutional oppression. Thus, Goodman advocates for interpretations of social justice that create opportunities for people to reach their full potential within a mutually responsible, interdependent society and seeks to establish a more equitable distribution of power and resources so that all people can live in dignity, self-determination, and physical and psychological safety. Finally, Adams, Bell, and Griffin (1997) interpret social justice in education as being both a process and a goal. The authors argue that the goal of social justice in education is full and equal participation of all groups in society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Thus, this concept of social justice includes a vision of a society that is equitable and where all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. These three concepts are nestled in interpretations that advocate for giving people what they fairly deserve and are consistent with the distributive paradigm.

In educational institutions, Rawls's (1971) theory of distributive justice appears to be a key conceptual lens for delivering social justice to a diverse array of constituents

who demand equality in terms of access and outcomes. Rawls's conceptual framework addresses the following three points: students have *equal rights* to education; educational institutions have the responsibility to provide *equal opportunities* for students to learn and benefit from the process of schooling; and educational institutions have the responsibility of ensuring that student outcomes allow them to *access resources equally* in the society. In practice, this social justice understanding is nested in concerns around comparable outcomes and is highly plausible in contexts in which all students are owed the same level of benefits or where students deserve the same level of outcomes. Barry (2005) also points out that this understanding is concerned with ensuring that education provides students with different life chances and leads to the realization of social justice. However, Connell (1993) argues that, in diverse educational contexts, the underlying weakness of Rawls's distributive type of appeal to social justice is related to its inability to answer commonplace questions such as: Who determines who deserves what? Who determines what can be defended and by whom? Who determines what we all value?

Furman and Shields (2005) argue that one of the significant consequences of distributive justice is that it is sometimes constructed as an extension of a political conception, which raises the possibility that it can easily become politicized. Specifically, even though both the political left and the political right agree that all citizens should have equality of status, those on the political right tend to emphasize equality of rules and processes whereas those on the left emphasize equality of outcome or sufficient equality of outcome to prevent injustice. Furman and Shields argue that, to achieve sufficient equality of outcome to prevent injustice, it makes sense to start with a radical reform of current institutional structures for those on the political left, whereas the status quo is

sufficient for those on the political right since rules and processes are already in place and it is up to individuals to take advantage of the resources available.

Dei and Karumanchery (2001) argue that, while the belief in the principles of fairness, justice, and equity undergird social justice understandings and appear consistent with liberal democratic values, the politics inherent in these values belie oppression and social advantage. Their argument is threefold. First, liberal values are constructed around dominant discursive formations and are tailored to the needs of the majority. Second, because these dominant discursive formations are popularized as expert explanations, they invariably inform individual understanding, influence personal and social values, determine what one is able to freely talk about, and alienate counter narratives. Third, because these discursive formations are tailored to the needs of the majority, as a criterion for justice, they dictate how society is ordered and rely on political validation to exclude some groups because of their lack of power.

Recent interpretations of social justice reveal an influence by postmodernist, poststructuralist, and feminist understandings (McInerney, 2004). For example, Iris Marion Young (1990) elaborates a theory of justice that advocates a politics of difference. Young's approach emphasizes associational aspects of social justice, such as institutional constraints to self-determination, because of an underlying assumption that

> Oppression consists in systematic institutional processes, which prevent some people from learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings, or institutionalized social processes which inhibit people's ability to play and communicate with others or express their feelings and perspectives on social life in contexts where others can listen. (p. 38)

Without rejecting the distributive paradigm, Young (1990) argues for its decentering so that domination and oppression resulting from institutional constraints on self-determination and self-development are taken as the starting point for a conception of social justice (p. 37). Thus, Young's extension of Rawls's (1971) theory of distributive justice to its associational aspects helps to articulate processes that determine distributive patterns and to highlight relationships that impact equal participation. These associational aspects are understood as recognition of difference, diversity, and equity in participation (Lister, 2008). Young's argument for these positions is twofold. First,

> The focus on redistribution of rights, opportunities and resources resulting from social cooperation diverts attention from social structures and institutional contexts that often help to determine distributive patterns such as decision-making power, decision-making procedures, and division of labour and culture that are embedded in social and institutional constructs and equally impact individual access, choice, opportunity, and outcomes. (as cited in Lister, 2008, p. 107)

Second, "if the distributive paradigm is metaphorically extended to non-material social goods such as recognition and respect, it misrepresents them as though they are static things, instead of a function of social relations and processes" (as cited in Lister, 2008, p. 107).

Gewirtz and Cribb's (2003) interpretation of social justice as a "concern with the principles and norms of social organizations and relationships necessary to achieve, and act upon, equal consideration of all people in their commonalities and difference" (p. 18) also extends Rawls's (1971) theory of distributive justice to its associational aspects. This interpretation is rooted in the delivery of social justice by emphasizing the importance of

individuals taking responsibility for the promotion of social justice in day-to-day activities. This interpretation is also nestled in constructs that see injustice as embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and theories that ignore social structures and institutional contexts that influence distributive patterns. Therefore, the substance of this interpretation of justice emphasizes individual responsibility and understanding of concepts of oppression as well as the fact that social justice is not reducible to issues of (re)distribution alone.

Honneth (Fraser & Honneth, 2003) presents a different challenge to the distributive paradigm. The starting point of Honneth's theory of justice is that the recognition of human dignity comprises a central principle of social justice. Accordingly, "the harm done by non-recognition and misrecognition is the worst form of injustice; indeed, it is the key to unlocking social injustice as a whole" (p. 133). In addition, "recognition is a vital human need, [a] deep-seated anthropological fact of the matter about the intersubjective nature of human beings" (p. 145). Honneth's conceptual framework is rooted in the notion of parity of participation, a norm of justice that requires social arrangements to permit all members of society to interact with one another as peers. As a norm of justice participatory parity rests on two conditions: the objective distribution of material resources and the intersubjective condition of institutionalized patterns of cultural value that ensure equal opportunities (Fraser & Honneth, 2003). Ignoring potential challenges with the recognition paradigm and relating Honneth's conceptual framework to educational institutions, it is arguable that the withdrawal of recognition is at the core of all experiences of injustice. Therefore, if schools use dominant frameworks without recognition of their impact on a diverse student body, then

these experiences of injustice are based on withdrawal of recognition, as suggested by Honneth.

Rather than counterpoise distributive and recognition paradigms, Fraser (Fraser & Honneth, 2003) proposes that distribution and recognition are two relatively independent dimensions of justice, corresponding to two-forked paradigms of justice that are manifested in class-based social justice movements and contemporary social movements respectively. Therefore, Fraser proposes a conception of social justice that combines (re)distribution and recognition. According to her, the advantage of a dual perspective rests in its ability to prevent the reduction of one social justice paradigm to the other, making individuals alert to potentially negative unintended side effects of one-sided remedies (Fraser & Honneth, 2003)

Although Fraser shares Honneth's (Fraser & Honneth, 2003) view that recognition plays an important role in social justice interpretations, and that recognition implies an explicit act of affirmation that can be expressed in various ways, Fraser (Fraser & Honneth, 2003) is also of the opinion that

- Recognition as affirmative leaves everyone's identity more or less unchanged as opposed to recognition as deconstruction where everyone's social identity is changed. (p. 13)
- Some forms of misrecognition call for an altogether different kind of recognition, meaning they require a deconstruction of the very terms in which group differences are elaborated. (p. 15)
- Misrecognition is a matter of externally manifest and publicly verifiable impediments to some people's standing as full members of society. (p. 31)

Weighing in on this discussion, Kompridis (2007) asserts that within a deontological nonsectarian norm of participatory parity, if recognition is presented as a matter of externally manifest and publicly verifiable experience, then it has the distinct advantage of being subject to critical scrutiny in public debate. Consequently, this understanding of justice incorporates both recognition and distribution concepts of social justice and is nested in conceptual frameworks that advocate for a distinction between different forms of oppression.

Thus far, I have examined works on distribution and recognition paradigms. This particular literature reveals the following scenarios. First, the distributive paradigm's focus on equality of opportunities provides an easily understood concept of social justice in educational institutions, even though according to Furman and Shields (2005), Rusch (2004), and Young (1990) it loses sight of other sites of injustice such as those perpetuated by invisible privilege, fostered in recursive knowledge relationships, or embedded in institutional contexts that influence distributive patterns. Second, while the various authors seek to establish universal principles of social justice, the current emphasis on associational aspects of social justice has led to major debates about the relative merits of (re)distributive and recognition approaches to social justice. Third, while the review of literature on social justice theoretical frameworks is miniscule compared to the plethora of available information, the various discourses and counterdiscourses confirm the contestability of social justice, not least in its definition. Fourth, as individuals struggle to identify which social justice interpretation is suitable for a particular scenario, it is important to remember that discourse influence praxis.

Educational Leadership and Social Justice

In most leadership theories, leaders are encouraged to impose their moral authority or vision (Greenfield, 1987) or to empower followers so that they can take action (Fullan, 2003; Heifetz, 1994). Along these lines, leadership has been defined as "the office, position or capacity of a leader; guidance....Ability to lead, exert authority, etc....A group of leaders" (*Funk & Wagnalls Standard Desk Dictionary*, 1974, p. 367). This definition of leadership implies certain role expectations as well as the use of power, positional or personal, to guide or exert authority in order to achieve desired objectives.

In the cluster of studies on leading for social justice, contemporary leadership concepts take a critical stance in both their understanding and definition of leadership. Foster (1989), for example, writes:

> Leadership is at its heart a critical practice, one that comments on present and former construction of reality, that holds up certain ideals for comparison, and that attempts at the enablement of a vision based on an interpretation of the past. In being critical, then, leadership is oriented not just toward the development of more perfect organizational structures, but toward a re-conceptualization of life practices where common ideals of freedom and democracy stand important. (p. 52)

Foster also notes that

> Leadership within a social justice framework carries a responsibility to advocate for a civic and moral education that leads to both self knowledge and community awareness and that takes on a shared task of critique and vision....Critical and visionary leadership is unsatisfied with dehumanizing or threatening social

> conditions and continually searches for a life which realizes more closely the Aristotelian ideal. (p. 56)

Bogotch (2002) defines social justice leadership as a "deliberate intervention that requires the moral use of power" (p. 1), whereas Heifetz (1994) defines leadership as mobilizing action to close the gap between the values we hold and the realities we face. These definitions and concepts situate individual leaders within a hierarchical structure and with formal power.

Exploring the moral aspects of leadership alluded to in the above definitions, Fullan (2003) identifies three aspects of leadership derived from moral purpose that are useful in conceptualizing leadership for social justice. These aspects include making a difference in the lives of students, reducing the gap between high and low performers, and transforming conditions so that growing commitment, engagement, and constant spawning of leadership in others is fostered. Concurring, Greenfield (2004) argues that

> The transforming leader looks for personal motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower. The result of the transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents. (pp. 175-176)

Theoharis (2004) also contends that moral leadership involves abandoning personal and professional confines and comforts for riskier waters of higher moral callings. Burns (1978) maintains that leaders should engage with followers from higher levels of morality so that leaders and followers alike are raised to more principled levels of judgement.

While not exhaustive, these constructs around moral leadership are critical to an understanding of educational leadership within a social justice framework.

In the literature that focuses on leadership for social justice, several authors provide glimpses on what would be expected of school administrators if they were to lead for social justice. For example, Bogotch (2002) asserts that educational leaders should "create and support forums for all voices to be heard...challenge structures built upon the so-called neutrality of objective reality, and acknowledge that systems in place represent and reproduce the dominant cultures and values in society" (p. 3). Furman and Shields (2005) contend that

> Leaders for social justice seek to challenge political, economic, and social structures that privilege some and disadvantage others. They challenge unequal power relations based on gender, social class, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, language and other systems of oppression. (p. 123)

Lee and McKerrow (2005) postulate that "social justice leaders strive for critique rather than conformity, compassion rather than competition, democracy rather than bureaucracy, polyphony rather than silencing, inclusion rather than exclusion, liberation rather than domination, action for change rather than inaction that preserves inequity" (pp. 1-2). Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) indicate

> Leaders interested in fostering and forwarding social justice ought to problematize existing practices and reform proposals with the purpose of not just becoming more efficient at doing more of the same, but with the purpose of imagining and constructing new institutional possibilities. (p. 162)

Finally, Theoharis (2004) contends that practising administrators must infuse equity and social justice in all aspects of their practise, including reconceptualizing their everyday work and thinking in ways that serve to raise awareness and/or increase the knowledge base that allows stakeholders to understand inequity.

In the spirit of the broad definitions of leadership articulated by Bogotch (2002), Heifetz (1994), and Foster (1989), as well as broad concepts around leading for social justice, two interpretations of the intersection between educational leadership and social justice emerge. First, educational administrators have a direct responsibility to deliver justice, even though this responsibility is mediated by institutional frameworks. Second, educational administrators are expected to use their power morally in order to incorporate normative concepts of social justice in their institutions (Barry, 2005: Furman & Shields, 2005). Accordingly, this responsibility to deliver social justice includes addressing organizational policies and practices that reflect and are nested within rules and processes that systematically disadvantage some groups (Shields, 2004).

With respect to the challenges inherent in social justice delivery, the presumed role that leaders play in addressing social justice has gained prominence through increasing emphasis on training educational leaders to deliver social justice. On the one hand, some studies indicate that leader training or preparation is believed to shape leader dispositions and contribute to their ability to tackle broader social justice issues in their institutions (Hafner, 2005). Bogotch (2002) also contends that formalized training puts educational leaders in a unique position to assist in the establishment of just arrangements by choosing actions that promote social justice or challenging structures built upon or structures that (un)intentionally reproduce dominant cultures and values in society. On

the other hand, some studies indicate that most leadership preparation programs do not adequately prepare their students to lead for social justice. Theoharis (2004), for example, reports that administration preparation programs are conservative and lacking in equity focus. Along the same lines, Marshall (2004) contends that

> Traditional training for educational leadership reflects a culture that has marginalized issues and concerns of social justice....Students and professors who present issues, interests, and understanding of social justice, race, poverty, disability, gay/lesbian, language minority students, and other marginalized groups are tolerated as long as they do not propose changing the normal activities or standards of practice. (pp. 6-7)

Rusch (2004) states

> Educational administration faculty have limited knowledge about how to prepare educational leaders to work with culturally and linguistically diverse population.... Faculty members perpetuate myopic views of equity and justice, show minimal understanding of democratic practices, and portray equity issues as no problem. (pp. 17-18)

Shields (2004) asserts that, unless leader training is specific and deliberate in shaping leader ability to undertake structural reforms needed to deliver justice, it is no match for emerging organizational realities since the "knowledge base for education has traditionally emphasized management and a narrow view of leadership theory" (p. 6). Concurring, Starratt (2004) argues that skill sets acquired in leadership preparation programs may not address social justice issues that cannot be explained rationally or technically. Therefore, it appears that leadership preparation alone may be insufficient to

close the gap between technical administrator knowledge and the reality faced in day-to-day responsibilities.

Additional challenges to social justice leadership arise from problems related to unreasonable demands imposed on leaders by the delivery of social justice. Barry (2005), for one, expresses concern around unfounded appeals to personal responsibility, arguing that the expectation for leaders to deliver social justice puts undue responsibility on individuals to rectify a situation that has its genesis in the social, political, cultural, and economic fabric of society. Similarly, Simkins (2005) argues that the expectation of leaders to deliver social justice seems almost intolerable both in the range of complexity and in internal tensions. Continuing, Barry argues that this reliance on leaders to deliver social justice ignores the role of the social structure in limiting options and fails to recognize that putting into practice ideas such as equal opportunity and personal responsibility would require a fundamental transformation of existing institutions. Furman and Shields (2005) also note that

> The delivery of social justice requires institutional intervention or reforms designed to challenge the fundamental inequities that arise, in large part, due to the inappropriate use of power by one group over another....and a careful examination of one's beliefs and practices as well as institutional practices. (p. 130)

Murphy (1999) further asserts, "not only do institutions secure justice more efficiently than could people acting without institutions, they also minimize costs people must sustain to secure justice" (p. 252).

Finally, without denying the powerful worldviews embedded in terminologies such as leadership and social justice or the complex problems and challenges involved in school administration, I cite Bogotch's (2002) assertion that educational leadership as a practice is

> Caught inside the tensions created by the images and power of having to be perceived by the public as a strong leader—while intellectually and morally recognizing the worth of others. Therefore, as a continuous social construct, educational leaders cannot be one design, one program, or one mind at the exclusion of other designs, programs, and minds. Additionally, at every step, educational leaders must articulate how their actions connect social justice inside and outside of schools. (p. 11)

In short, the delivery of social justice involves risk and implies a collective endeavour that seeks to establish social realities. Therefore, the responsibility for its delivery should not rest solely on one person or fail to take into account the role of social structures in limiting options.

In conclusion, concepts related to leadership for social justice position administrative practice as a deliberate endeavour, enacted to address identified educational issues. As such, a critical aspect of educational leadership is the expectation that administrators will engender the kind of environment that facilitates the delivery of social justice. Such an expectation entails real-world implications such as identifying unjust conditions that violate social justice principles and identifying how social, economic, and political relations can be (re)ordered to deliver social justice (Shields, 2004). Similarly, administrators are expected to envision strategies to deliver social

justice that embrace the disjunction between technical and moral aspects of their leadership, on the one hand, and privilege and oppression, on the other (Starratt, 2004). Finally, educational administrators are expected to develop the capacity to undertake ongoing analysis and monitoring of all aspects of practice in order to dismantle structural barriers and to make a difference in the lives of students (Fullan, 2003). Consequently, the practice of educational administration cannot be separated from how social justice theories and practices are (re)defined, conceptualized, and practiced.

Social Construction of Reality

Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that social constructions arise in part from the institutionalization of patterns of interaction and meaning and subsequently influence individual, social, and institutional perspectives and understandings. In their view, social constructs include norms or pervasive attitudes towards everything from basic biological functions to the most sophisticated and complex social and cultural structures that influence values, assumptions, relationships, politics, morality, ethics, identity, and so forth. Therefore, social constructs are part of human social experience and can be equated to reality by consensus. Distinguishing between institutional and relational structure, Lopez and Scott (2000) observe that

> In the former, social structure is seen as comprising those cultural or normative patterns that define the expectations agents hold about each other's behaviour and that organize their enduring relations with each other. In the latter, social structure is seen as comprising the relationships themselves, understood as patterns of causal interconnection and interdependence, influenced by the position(s) one occupies within a class structure or social status order. (p. 3)

The issue of social constructions has relevance beyond educational settings because such constructions are enormously powerful in determining one's identity and because they answer profound questions such as: Who am I? Why am I? Who are you? Why are you? Where do I belong? Where am I? (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Various authors also indicate that problems with social constructions emerge when ontologically arbitrary social constructs are presented as reality, when power is used to address issues in ways that advantage some groups over others, or when differential treatment of individuals is based purely on social distinctions. For example, focusing on discursive formation related to social constructions and presupposing that groups in power present ontologically arbitrary constructs as a way of life, Lopez and Scott (2000) argue that dominant discursive formations play an important role in helping individuals understand institutional and relational structures that influence their treatment. Wilson (1997) contends that norms of relationships shape individual perception and position them in relation to discursive formations that allow them to make sense of their identity within their own contexts. Similarly, Smith (1999) posits that

> What make ideas around social constructions real in the system of knowledge is the formations of culture and the relations of power in which these concepts are located. What an individual is—or how they might approach their work—is based on debates and systems for organizing and regulating whole societies predicated purely on ideas. (p. 49)

As Fine and Weis (2004) postulate, "social constructs such as race, gender, class, and ability impact on equal participation of individuals by shaping their realities and

perceptions and forcing them to carve out identities individually and collectively in relation to school practices that stratify" (p. 17). Fine and Weis also note that

> While individuals may be tempted to resist these categories of social life, one still needs to take seriously the possibility that categories become real inside institutional life, yielding due political and economic consequences. For students, even if resisted, these realities become foundational to social identities. (p. xviii)

To these authors, a primary concern is the structuring of individual perceptions and dispositions. A secondary concern is the possibility that an endorsement of the norms of dominant culture can shape individual experiences in regard to preferences towards certain intellectual activities, social groups, and social skills. A tertiary concern is the possibility that experiences related to particular social constructs can lead to internalized norms of bias, prejudice, and privilege, as part of day-to-day socialization (see Young, 1990).

Constructs related to administrator understanding of social justice are of particular interest in this study. These constructs, among others, play a vital role in informing administrator assumptions, attitudes, actions, and language while simultaneously embedding themselves in educational traditions, practices, and beliefs that inform administrative practice. In an attempt to frame concerns related to institutional and social constructs within a critical discourse analysis, van Dijk (2001) refers to language users as social actors, with both personal and social cognition. In his view, both types of cognition influence interaction and discourse of individual members and govern the collective actions of a group. Consequently, how personal and social cognition influence everyday discourse, interaction, and action; how school administrators interpret day-to-day

educational issues; and what types of knowledge inform leader actions are important considerations.

Similarly, concerns with institutional constructs centre on the presumed link between administrative practices and dominant worldviews. These concerns focus on administrators' ability to recognize how their day-to-day functions use "intimate, privileged and tacit knowledge and experience" (Fullan, 2003, p. 383). These concerns also relate to what Fine and Weis (2004) indicate as educational leaders' ability to "theorize explicitly and render visible both individual and collective relations to other groups and to larger socio political formation" (p. xvii). Bogotch (2002) sums up these matters as ability to "challenge structures built upon the so-called neutrality of objective reality and acknowledge that the systems represent and subsequently reproduce the dominant culture and values in society" (p. 2). Freire (1970/1990) too expresses concerns with institutional constructs in relation to an educational institution's ability to relate education to the concepts of freedom, political power, and the social basis of self-respect. Specifically, these concerns centre on administrator decisions that may privilege certain groups; affect definitions of goals, directions, and influence; and highlight authoritative allocation of values.

In sum, literature on social constructs highlights the importance of social knowledge in the maintenance of prevailing social systems. As Gramsci observes, the interests of the ruling class are reflected not only in politics and ideology but also in the taken-for-granted knowledge that appears as common sense (as cited in Hall, Lumley, & McLennan, 1978). Therefore, social constructions have vital consequences for the positioning of people in society; they are not neutral or without impact; and they produce

senses of the self that may liberate or senses of self that may be negative, destructive, or oppressive (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). These concerns with the influence of institutional constructs and other social constructs also arise in part because prevailing worldviews give rise to practices that engender hegemonic relations, which, according to Foucault (1980), do not simply dominate individuals but also incorporate and make them function in ways that may appear contradictory.

Chapter Summary

This review of literature has alluded to an educational condition where school administrators are expected to adapt their practices to meet the changing and diverse needs of their community. Specifically, the chapter sketched social justice theoretical frameworks, constructs associated with leadership for social justice, and "the discussion of social justice as a deliberate intervention that challenges fundamental inequities" (Furman & Shields, 2005, p. 130). By relating the broad concepts of social justice, leadership, and social constructions to personal and social cognition of educational leaders, this chapter provided a further glimpse into how school administrators, as social actors, rely on their personal knowledge in their day-to-day work and how accepted knowledge influences the actions of other individuals and groups (van Dijk, 2001) within educational institutions.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This study was undertaken to investigate the impact of social constructs on school administrator understanding of social justice. Specifically, it explored how school administrators' ways of knowing, valuing, and relating influenced their understanding of social justice. This chapter discusses the study methodology. The chapter presents the research design, setting, sample population, research instrument, and data collection and analysis procedures. It concludes with a statement of the ethical implications and the strategies used to protect the rights of the participants.

Research Design

The study used an exploratory qualitative research methodology to explore the impact of social constructs on administrator understanding of social justice; to explore how administrators' ways of knowing, valuing, and relating influenced their understanding of social justice; and to initiate conversations that encourage school administrators to analyze how they negotiated and reconfigured dominant social justice narratives in their daily practice.

According to Creswell (2005), the purpose of qualitative research is to present multiple perspectives of individuals in order to represent the complexity of the world. Specifically, Creswell indicates, "qualitative research is a type of educational research in which the researcher relies on the views of the participants, asks broad general questions, collects data consisting largely of text from participants, describes and analyzes those words for themes" (p. 39). Thus, exploratory qualitative research, as a method of inquiry, excels at bringing about an understanding of a complex issue and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research because of a detailed

contextual analysis of a limited number of events and their relationships (Creswell, 2005). Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) posit that "qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationships between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry" (p. 8). These goals are consistent with the present endeavour. Consequently, an exploratory qualitative study design was deemed appropriate for this study since it provided an avenue to explore deeper meanings embedded in administrative practice.

The development of the research instrument used existing literature and social justice theoretical frameworks as guideposts to generate open-ended questions. The study also relied on critical incidents, identified by study participants, as an entry point to explore issues related to social constructs. Specifically, administrators were asked to explore and discuss a critical incident related to bullying. Open-ended interview questions were used to probe administrator action(s), the impact of actions taken, values and assumptions that undergird choice of action, and relationship(s) to broader social justice issues. The use of open-ended questions and a critical incident served as the starting point for understanding the context of administrative practice and provided an opportunity for reflection on rationalized and intuitive actions taken when addressing complex issues such as the one presented in the critical incident.

Site and Sample Selection

The study sample comprised 3 individuals who held administrative positions in secondary schools in Toronto, Ontario. This sample size was deemed sufficient since

> It is typical in qualitative research to study a few individuals or a few cases. This is because the overall ability of the researcher to provide an in-depth picture

> diminishes with the addition of each new individual or site. One objective of qualitative research is to present the complexity of a site or of the information provided by individuals. (Creswell, 2005, p. 207)

In order to develop in-depth exploration of the impact of social constructs on school administrator understanding of social justice, the study sample was restricted to school administrators because of their role in ensuring that education delivers its intended benefits to all students equally and in enforcing educational policies and procedures. Specifically, the study employed purposeful sampling to select study participants. According to Creswell (2005), in purposeful sampling, "the researcher intentionally selects people or sites who can best help us understand our phenomenon" (p. 203) and, as a strategy, it is suitable for "both individuals and groups" (p. 204). This strategy was used before data collection started and assumed that all school administrators were information rich.

The study employed a second sampling strategy, maximal variation sampling, in order to provide multiple perspectives and to build complexity into the research. According to Creswell (2005), in maximal variation sampling, researchers sample "cases or individuals that differ on some characteristic or trait" (p. 204). Therefore, the study solicited participation of school administrators from both Catholic and Public school systems, in order to ensure that selected sites and participants were representative of the two dominant school boards that operate in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). By having representation from both the Public and Catholic schools, the study was able to capture the perspectives of individuals within both school systems. The use of these two sampling

strategies is consistent with characteristic of qualitative research, where the intent is to present multiple perspectives of individuals (Creswell, 2005).

Recruitment

To begin the process of recruiting participants, I referred to school district websites to compile a list of all secondary schools in the GTA, including names and contact information of the school principals. I also asked my personal and professional contacts to distribute my contact information to colleagues who might be interested in participating in the study.

From this master list, I selected 10 secondary schools where one or both of the following conditions existed: (a) there was an existing contact with the school principal or with another person who had a contact with the school principal; and (b) the potential participants were located in close proximity to my workplace or residence in order to minimize travel time.

Once potential participants were identified, I sent a letter of invitation to the 10 school principals inviting them to participate in the study. I subsequently contacted potential study participants by telephone to confirm their interest in participating in the study; their availability to participate; and the date, time, and location of the interview. Once the 3 study participants were identified, I sent an e-mail confirming arrangements for the interview, with the ethics consent form and instructions on how to complete the form. No personal relationships existed between study participants and myself.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through individual interviews with 3 school administrators using open-ended questions. According to Creswell's (2005) Procedural Criteria (p. 274),

open-ended questions provide an avenue to understand the action of school administrators in their own words. Seidman (1998) also contends that

> The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to "evaluate" as the term is normally used…at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience. (p. 3)

Thus, the data collection methods were consistent with philosophical assumptions and characteristics of qualitative research. As noted by Creswell, the latter includes the presentation of multiple perspectives, the researcher as an instrument of data collection, and the focus on participants' views.

Interviews began by asking participants a general question regarding memorable moments or big lessons in administrative practice. Follow-up questions focused on a critical incident identified by participants. Participants were asked to narrate a critical incident related to bullying. The reasons bullying was chosen as an entry point is fourfold. First, bullying is a common occurrence in schools, and one which school administrators would find easy to speak about. Second, from a human rights perspective, students have the right to a school environment free from all forms of harassment, bullying, threats and violence. Third, violence in schools, which includes bullying, is increasingly recognized as a social justice problem (Mercy & O'Carroll, 1988). Fourth, given that bullying may occur when individuals do not believe that the person being bullied is of equal status, the issue of bullying has serious implications on the realization of just social arrangements. Therefore, the issue of bullying represents a methodological entry point into the investigation of social justice constructs. (The interview guide is

available in Appendix A.) Interviews were 60 minutes in length. One participant chose not to have the interview audio taped, so I took copious notes. The rest of the interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. Both interview notes and transcribed interviews were later e-mailed to the participants for verification, requesting clarification as necessary.

Data Analysis

The interview data were subjected to inductive thematic analysis. An inductive thematic analysis refers to a data analysis process that goes from detailed data to general codes and themes (Tesch, 1990). In the study, a theme was defined as a "pattern found in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4). As such, thematic analysis involved the identification and analysis of themes and patterns of similarity within the qualitative data (Creswell, 2005).

Following data collection, a comprehensive process of data coding and identification of themes was undertaken. This process, even though described in a systematic, step-by-step fashion, was an "iterative process" (Creswell, 2005, p. 232) wherein each step recurred as often as necessary to draw meaning from the data. The first step in the data analysis was to transcribe the data, ending up with a 30-page, single-spaced document. After transcribing field notes, I read the transcripts, writing down my notes and points that needed additional clarification. I also began the data analysis by describing and exploring the data in order to obtain a general sense of the data, to organize the data, and to consider whether more data were needed. For example, as interview transcripts were reviewed, sentences with similar properties were grouped

together. I recorded my first impressions of the data by highlighting memorable moments in administrative practice; how administrators interpreted social justice; bullying issues and resolution; ethical dilemmas; contested words; expressed purpose attached to expressions; and knowledge base and values identified by administrators as important. These first impressions of the data were linked to administrator response to study questions and were descriptive in nature.

To organize the data further, I developed a matrix, adapted from Mayring's (2000) Step Model of Deductive and Inductive Category Development and Creswell's Qualitative Process of Data Analysis (2005, p. 231). The matrix was based on a list of categories and units of analysis consistent with Mayring's (2000) recommendations for an *a priori* coding scheme to act as a guidepost. Deductive analytic strategies yielded a matrix that was used to display the data. The criterion used for the coding scheme was derived from the literature review, research questions, and deconstruction processes for isolating assumptions embedded in the data. Acknowledging that the criteria provided were not exhaustive, the categories were tentative and deduced step by step. Additionally, with the development of the matrix, I was able to put more thought into how the data could be organized, how to divide data into manageable text segments, how to develop broad themes, and how to select specific data to use or disregard. This type of coding allowed me to "consider underlying meaning" (Creswell, 2005, p. 238) and to "develop the aspects of interpretation and the categories, as near as possible to the material" (Mayring, 2000, p. 2).

The second step in the data analysis involved combining and cataloguing related patterns into subthemes. These categories were arranged and rearranged until I was

satisfied that the concepts were similar and should be grouped together. At the same time, key themes were grouped together and rearranged until I was satisfied that the themes were similar and should be grouped together. Specifically, themes were identified by "identifying codes that participants frequently discuss, are unique or surprising, have the most evidence to support them, or those you might expect to when studying the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2005, p. 239). "Through the process of eliminating redundancies" (Creswell, 2005, p. 243), certain themes emerged from participants, such as bullying phenomenon; resolution of bullying; social justice interpretations; knowledge, values, and relationships that administrators need to cultivate to resolve school issues; ethical dilemmas; stakeholders involved in bullying; relationships with teachers, parents, students, and community; social construction of reality as it relates to bully, victim, instigator, and perpetrator constructs; and administrative constructs. These themes were subsequently reduced to four major themes and were pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of major themes.

The third step in the data analysis involved building a valid argument for choosing the themes. This was done by reading the related literature, reviewing the information, and incorporating participant feedback in the analysis. Furthermore, seeking to go beyond describing thematic observations, once major themes for analysis were identified and justified, I used deconstruction to analyze study data. The context for analysis was adapted from Richardson's (1998) Participatory and Advocacy Criteria (as cited in Creswell, 2005, p. 274). Thus, the use of deconstruction allowed for the inspection of language used by participants in order to identify images conveyed and to expose assumptions or constructs embedded in the language.

This process of analyzing data using deconstruction involved looking for contested words or words with multiple meanings, such as victim; words that identified ideological positions; words that conveyed privileged or unprivileged status; words that conveyed specific social constructs; and words that conveyed understanding of social justice. The analytic process also paid close attention to aspects of administrator language that conveyed experiences and opinions, including public contestation, rationale, and substantive contribution to understanding of social life; conveyed awareness and exposure to social justice issues; conveyed administrator practice in relation to normative values, personal sense of meaning, and social meanings attached to actions; conveyed administrator orientations or attitudes in relation to norms of social relations; conveyed affirmative and transformative strategies embedded in administrator actions; and conveyed administrator use of power to resolve school issues. Finally, the analytic process paid particular attention to how school administrators used words when referring to the various actors in their critical incident or when referring to broader issues of social justice. It should be noted that this process was iterative, and even without developing an initial *a priori* list, it was possible to analyze data by reviewing interview transcripts and my report on research findings.

The use of deconstruction as a form of critique and strategy is consistent with assertions that deconstruction is a strategic device for reading and interpreting texts and language (Derrida, 1967/1976; Faulconer, 1998) or "simply a question of being alert to other implications" (Derrida, 1972, p. 231). Similarly, deconstruction denotes "a thoughtful play of contradiction, multiple references, and the ceaseless questioning of conclusion and response" (Lye, 1996, p. 6) or "an attitude, in the root sense of the

word.... A position one has with regard to something" (Faulconer, 1998, p. 2). Therefore, the analysis paid particular attention to significance and meanings attached to aspects of administrative practice and used bullying as an entry point to identify how constructs associated with administrative roles, people involved in bullying, social justice, and relationships transformed and reproduced reality.

The final level of data analysis involved putting forth a discursive set of propositions that offer insights into how social constructs impact school administrator understanding of social justice. Study results revealed that social constructs influenced administrator choice of action and their understanding of social justice. Implicitly, administrators relied on tacit knowledge, personal values, and guidelines established by school boards when framing administrative issues. In sum, the inductive thematic analysis of the data yielded the following themes: (a) constructs of people involved in bullying, (b) relationships as fundamental to administrative practice, (c) administrative constructs, and (d) social justice constructs. This data analysis procedure corresponds to steps commonly used in qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2005) and is consistent with how deconstruction is used to analyze texts.

Ethical Considerations

Social research is inevitably concerned with human beings. People are the researcher's object of interest and source of information. Therefore, there is always the danger of treating human beings in an instrumental way (Banczyk, 2003). The problem is especially significant when one touches on sensitive topics. The theme of my research can be viewed as such, since it is concerned with how administrator beliefs, assumptions, and values impact their understanding of social justice. For example, if participants are

presented in an unfavourable light, the research results could put their professionalism in question. Therefore, to address this ethical issue, the study was conducted in accordance with requirements for ethical research with human participants, as established by the Brock University Ethics Review Board (see Appendix B). Following these requirements, the study protected the anonymity of research sites and participants by assigning numbers and by developing a composite picture of the group during data analysis.

Two other ethical issues arose because participants were asked to reflect on their practice and their choice of action about a potentially sensitive situation, and because some participants were referred by their colleagues. Specifically, some participants may have felt stressed, felt that the study was inappropriately intrusive into their role as schools principals, or felt coerced because their colleagues invited them to the study. To address these ethical issues, study participants were reassured that the study was not evaluative, information provided was confidential, and the information would not be used for any purposes other than to help the principal investigator understand how social constructs impact understanding of social justice. Participants were also advised that they could choose not to answer any questions they felt would put them at risk, did not have to participate because they were referred by a colleague, and could withdraw from the study at any time without any negative repercussions.

Because of these potential risks, the issue of informed consent was significant. All attempts were made to ensure that the research was transparent and that participants were informed about the aim of the study. Participants were advised of their right to refuse to respond to any questions they found uncomfortable, to refrain from participating in the study, or to withdraw from the study at any time. Furthermore, the list of questions was

provided in advance so that participants could make an informed decision as to whether they wanted to participate in the research.

Finally, in order to ensure that the findings were reported accurately and were reflective of participants' points of view, data and study findings were reported honestly without changing or altering the findings to satisfy any interest groups, including giving due credit for material quoted from other studies.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore how administrators' ways of knowing, valuing, and relating influenced their understanding of social justice. Three school administrators from the GTA—1 male from the Catholic School Board, 1 male from the Public School Board, and 1 female from the Public School Board—were interviewed as part of the study. The school administrators are referred to as Mr. Xo, Mr. Yoo, and Mrs. Zee in this report. The names of the school administrators and the names of students have been altered to protect their identity.

This chapter presents findings of the study. The issue of bullying was used as one entry point, out of a possible multitude of entry points, into understanding the impact of social constructs on administrator understanding of social justice. The findings are presented in such a way that focuses attention on bullying, interactions and interpersonal relationships related to the bullying cases, construction of people and issues, and interpretation of social justice. The results are presented in three parts. Part 1 presents participants' descriptions of the bullying cases, resolution of the cases, and ethical dilemmas the administrators disclosed relating to the cases. Part 2 presents the results on administrators' relationships with teachers, parents, and students. Part 3 concludes by presenting how administrators constructed their reality as it relates to social justice, bullying, people involved in the bullying cases, and administrative roles.

Cases of Bullying

Three bullying cases were described by school administrators interviewed. These bullying cases were chosen by the administrators because of their role in resolving the cases and because of broader implications to administrator interactions with the

community. Due regard was therefore given to the context and to numerous other variables, including ethical dilemmas associated with administrator actions.

Study participants were not provided with definitions of bullying and social justice. Rather, administrators were asked to construct their understanding of these two key issues through description of the bullying cases and through articulation of their understanding of the issues. Having administrators describe their understanding of social justice with respect to bullying in their schools and their actions to resolve the bullying cases helped to contextualize individual perceptions and actions, and to encapsulate key bullying experiences as social phenomena. These descriptions also highlighted linkages between social constructs and administrator understanding of social justice as well as linkages between experiences of bullying and the realization of just social arrangements. School administrators interviewed chose different bullying cases. None of the bullying cases involved physical violence. Two of the cases involved threats of violence. This section discusses each case in detail.

Bullying Case No. 1

Mr. Xo chose a case that involved one family, whose son John was constantly accused of bullying. The bullying experiences occurred over time and involved many students. The bullying took place in various settings within the school during breaks and outside the classroom. The bullying experiences were also unpredictable and seemed to occur without provocation. These bullying accusations were made by fellow students, teachers, and John's parents. Initially, John was accused of verbal and physical aggression towards other students. Narrating these accusations, Mr. Xo indicated that "John was accused of calling other students dumb and fat, threatening to beat up another

student, making fun of and telling a student of Asian background to go back to where he came from." Counter accusations alleging that John was being bullied were also made by John, his parents, and one of the teachers. As Mr. Xo reported,

> The office had received reports from John and a teacher indicating that other students had ganged up against John by telling supply teachers to watch out for John's behaviour. John and his parents had complained that other students were calling him fat and making fun of his braces.

The resolution of John's case took a long time and could be traced back to actions by John's teachers. Using training on bullying and the school code of conduct as a reference point, teachers were the focal point for addressing student issues that occurred in the classroom. Mr. Xo also reported that initial actions to address accusations leveled at John included advising other students to talk to someone about the bullying, walk away from John, and tell John to stop his behaviour; detention; and calling John's parents to solicit their support in addressing the issue. Other general strategies were also put in place by the school to resolve or minimize bullying. These strategies included students making presentations on bullying; undertaking research projects on bullying; and referring to the administrator all serious incidents such as fights, repeated infractions, student injuries, swearing at teachers, or noncompliance with teacher directives.

As the number of calls to John's parents increased and the bullying continued unabated, Mr. Xo reported that, on one hand,

> None of the strategies the school implemented seemed to deter John from bullying. His parents started experiencing difficulty dealing with and/or responding to all the calls. The parents also started advocating on John's behalf in

> ways the teachers felt was threatening and intimidating; demanding explanations in order to document how teachers were handling reported cases of bullying involving John; and expressing that John was being harassed by the teachers and other students.

On the other hand, he said, the teachers were refusing to get involved, feeling that their reputation within the community would be at stake.

Taking over from the teachers, Mr. Xo implemented additional strategies. He immediately put together a support team. He also convened a meeting with teachers and guidance counselors. At the meeting, the school resolved to work with John and his family to find solutions to the bullying issue. The school also resolved that Mr. Xo would be the only contact with John's family. Henceforth, all incidents involving John were to be reported to Mr. Xo. In order to help John comprehend the impact of his actions, the school decided to focus on reinforcing positive student behaviours and requiring John to document and reflect on his actions in a journal.

Implementation of these strategies did not seem to reduce the number of bullying accusations leveled against John. Therefore, Mr. Xo decided to solicit the support of the school superintendent: "Immediately the superintendent was involved in the case, he recommended that we involve a large support team to look into the issues raised by the school, John, and John's parents." The final team comprised Mr. Xo, the school superintendent, a special education team, and a school guidance counselor.

In the end, a decision was made to transfer John to another school. This decision was influenced in part by changes in John's family situation and the need to place him in a school that was better equipped to meet his learning needs. Mr. Xo reported that after

John left his school, there was a decrease in the frequency of bullying reports. Pondering his resolution of the case, Mr. Xo disclosed,

> John's case created a lot of doubt on what the school did as a team, made me question if the teachers were treating John differently, and made the teachers and I question if other students were involved in bullying John since we were not able to surmise if other students were causing the initial harassment.

The guidelines that helped Mr. Xo address this particular bullying case had been set by the school board in the school Code of Conduct. For example, he pointed out that the Code of Conduct outlines what constitutes bullying as well as actions to be taken. In addition, Mr. Xo noted that his actions were influenced by values around administrative roles and expectations regarding normative student behaviours. These values and expectations included maintaining discipline and safety, demonstrating understanding, respect and dignity, and equitable treatment of students.

The resolution of John's case raised ethical dilemmas for Mr. Xo. He wondered how John's behaviour was impacting other students, what other students thought of him as an administrator, or what they thought about the school's (in)ability to positively influence John's behaviour. The other question at the back of Mr. Xo's mind was whether John was a troubled young man, a victim, or if he was simply getting away with unacceptable behaviour.

Bullying Case No. 2

Mr. Yoo narrated an incident involving Jackie, a female student who was being threatened and intimidated by Cathy, another female student in the same class. Jackie accused Cathy of threatening to beat her and using her friends to act as heavies to harass

her younger sister. According to Mr. Yoo, what was happening was a case of intimidation, with indications that the interaction may have been physical. These incidents of bullying were reported by Jackie's parent and were alleged to have occurred in the playground during recess, along the corridors inside the school, and outside of school premises. Mr. Yoo was unaware that one of the teachers had been informed of three previous bullying occurrences until the matter was reported by Jackie's parent.

In this bullying case, Mr. Yoo opted for immediate and swift action. He removed Cathy from class, contacted her parents, and imposed immediate suspension. Cathy and Jackie were given the support of a social worker, who was tasked with developing a plan of intervention that involved group work and individual counseling. Additionally, Mr. Yoo opted not to get the perspective of Jackie because he did not want other students to think that she had reported them to the office. He felt that bringing Jackie in would put her at risk of further intimidation or violence. Mr. Yoo also felt he would not be there to protect Jackie outside school premises nor inside the school since the location of bullying incidents or the bully's targets could not be predicted.

Values around fairness, a desire to maintain cordial relationships with Jackie's parents, expectations of students as law-abiding citizens, expectations around administrator actions perceived as being without compromise, and expectations associated with the school board's Zero Tolerance Policy played a key part in Mr. Yoo's choice of action. As he pointed out,

> Jackie's parents were upset and they wanted something done immediately. On the other hand, Cathy herself is no saint since she often displayed disregard for school norms, is known for hanging around a group of bad students, and has very little

> interest in learning. I was influenced by the need to keep all students safe since no student should feel afraid to come to school. I was also influenced by a desire to see that justice was done quickly, fairly and consistently.
>
> Our schools operate under a Code of Conduct. This Code has clearly laid out expectations and consequences. Students and their parents are made aware of this Code and expect that it will be followed.

Describing ethical dilemmas encountered, Mr. Yoo indicated that his dilemmas arose out of his personal belief that students who bullied were needy students. According to him, these students had serious issues at home. Mr. Yoo elaborated:

> Some of the students who bully have unhappy parents with other issues on their minds or other issues to take care of—these parents cannot focus on parenting their children or supporting their children in school and tend to take their frustration out on the system. Therefore, how can one hold students with such parents solely responsible for their failures when their parents are not able to guide them properly?

Furthermore, Mr. Yoo reported that his years of experience as an administrator had taught him that these unhappy parents expected justice to be immediate and rarely acknowledged that students accused of bullying are victims, had rights, and needed help. Giving examples, he reiterated that

> When it comes to addressing issues of bullying, [unhappy parents] would want Zero Tolerance enforced—these bullying incidents tend to provide those [unhappy parents] with another opportunity to once again focus on their personal situation instead of focusing on the issue at hand. I do not believe in a Zero Tolerance

> Policy. Therefore, in each case I have to think about the whole school community, whole school safety, other students' well-being, and the merits of the case.

Mr. Yoo also experienced dilemmas around the school's ability to create environments where bullying and deviant behaviour did not occur. Stressing the importance of environments on student behaviours, Mr. Yoo argued that environments where negative behaviours thrive and lack of parental guidance and support in resolving behavioural issues was part of the problem for students accused of bullying. As such, he wondered,

> What environments (school or home) were initiating such behaviours on the part of the instigator? How could the school support the student being harassed? What consequences would be appropriate other than encouraging police to impose conditions requiring this student to transfer or issuing a notice denying access to the school? Why did such occurrences go unnoticed before or why were no actions taken by the teachers?

In sum, Mr. Yoo's swift and immediate action were influenced by values and expectations associated with his role as an administrator. In addition, his overarching concern was how to hold students—who are from environments where negative behaviours thrive—responsible for their actions whilst the adults responsible for those environments were not being held accountable.

Bullying Case No. 3

Mrs. Zee narrated a case involving a female student, Ashley, who was being bullied by her former friends. At a meeting called by Ashley's parents, Mrs. Zee learned that Ashley had told her parents that three of her former friends, Zoë, Jane, and Michelle,

were leering at her in the hallways, spreading malicious gossip, and making remarks that made her uncomfortable. Ashley also accused Zoë, Jane, and Michelle of using profanity around her and calling her a slut because of the way she dressed. These bullying incidents took place in school hallways and outside school premises.

To resolve the case, Mrs. Zee called Zoë, Jane, and Michelle to her office. She met with them one-on-one to determine their role in bullying allegations reported by Ashley. When confronted, Zoë, Jane, and Michelle denied bullying Ashley, but admitted that they were no longer friends with her. After this meeting, Mrs. Zee concluded that although Ashley and the girls were no longer friends, she could not determine if any bullying had occurred. She also indicated that it was unrealistic to accommodate demands made by Ashley's parents to have these students transferred to another school without proof of their involvement in bullying Ashley. According to Mrs. Zee,

> Consequences such as transferring students, suspensions, and expulsions often have a negative impact on students. I cannot use them in a case where I have no proof and where a student is accused of bullying for the first time.
>
> I do not believe in Zero Tolerance or the use of Safe School Transfers unless weapons are involved. In my view, these actions, while seeming to immediately address the problems, are easily abused consequences by administrators who wish to remove troubled students from their schools without increasing their suspension and expulsion numbers—I have witnessed cases where innocent students get caught or are victimized by these policies simply because they happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.... In all cases, I

> use my discretion and review all relevant information before deciding on the choice of action.

In the end, the case was treated as a potential bullying case. Zoë, Jane, and Michelle were allowed to go back to class, with a warning that their parents would be notified if Mrs. Zee found out that they had bullied Ashley. Actions were also taken to ensure that Ashley's teachers and the guidance counselor were aware of the allegation and would keep an eye on the situation.

The decision not to suspend or transfer Zoë, Jane, and Michelle angered Ashley's parents. Consequently, Ashley was withdrawn from the school and enrolled in another school in the neighbourhood. For Mrs. Zee, since her preference for a resolution involving dialogue between Ashley and the three girls was rejected, she questioned,

> What could I have done to get to the truth of the matter while still ensuring that all students felt safe? What action should I have taken, short of transferring the girls, which would have helped Ashley feel safe and stay in my school? Why would these students call Ashley names because of the way she dressed while they appear to dress the same way?

The values that influenced Mrs. Zee's resolution of this bullying case were varied. Like other administrators, safety, security, and enforcing school rules were important. Mrs. Zee also indicated that it was important that her actions were seen as realistic and meriting the situation or that an innocent student was not victimized. Finally, concerns or values around credibility of the allegations influenced Mrs. Zee's actions. According to her, Ashley, Zoë, Jane, and Michelle dressed the same way. Therefore she did not believe that these girls could have called Ashley a slut because of the way she dressed. In

addition, when assessing her choice of action, Mrs. Zee took into consideration the fact that these students had not been in trouble before and the lack of evidence to suggest bullying had occurred.

A review of the three bullying cases and their resolutions reveal various relational values. These values were embedded in the questions administrators asked of themselves, the ethical dilemmas disclosed regarding their resolution of the bullying case, and the questions they asked students accused of bullying. In particular, dilemmas associated with these values arose out of the administrators desire to ensure that their decisions reflected the facts as presented; took into account the needs of the students, the community, and the school; and maintained safety and acceptable relations between students.

Relationships

Cross-case analysis of the administrators' experiences with the cases of bullying drew attention to the importance the administrators placed on establishing relationships with various stakeholders. In one aspect, the ability to establish and maintain these relationships underscored administrators' key role in fostering environments that enabled them to carry out their functions, to resolve interpersonal conflicts, and to resolve conflicts around resources and priorities. The second aspect of these relationships was related to social justice as a basis for reflecting on and practicing educational leadership. Within this realm, the administrators indicated that they were expected to address issues that arose within their schools in ways that were perceived as just or in ways that allowed students to realize different life chances.

Analysis of the data indicated that these administrators were concerned with three broad types of relationships: general relationships, relationships with teachers, and

relationships with parents and students. Considering the various unequal social relations embedded in the phenomena of bullying, the presentation of results in this section will highlight the language the administrators used to understand and explain these relationships, including how various individuals were perceived, how individuals were treated in everyday life, and the identity those individuals held of themselves.

General Relationships

Administrators disclosed that they established and maintained relationships with various stakeholders. Mr. Yoo presented these relationships as critical and exceptional since they enabled administrators to address administrative issues that occurred in greater frequency and whose impacts were greater. The importance of these relationships could also be gleaned from Mrs. Zee's assertion that relationships allowed administrators to achieve both personal and organizational goals. Mrs. Zee clarified that

> School administration is about relationships, nurturing those relationships, establishing trust, and being inclusive. As administrators, not knowing where our allies are on any given issue demands that we approach administrative practice with an open mind and with the intention of involving everyone in finding solutions to school problems.

Views regarding the importance of these relationships also surfaced in other administrator narratives. For example, both Mr. Xo and Mr. Yoo noted that a central component of their role was establishing and maintaining relationships that enabled them to address the various administrative issues that they encountered. As Mr. Xo elaborated,

> Within education, school administrators sometimes find that they have a short window of opportunity to implement initiatives. Yet education is about

relationships, and, as such, there is need to ensure that the implementation phase of any initiative allows for time to involve other people.

School administrators spend valuable time running around in order to gather momentum and to do things in the most efficient way possible. Yet education is about relationships, and the achievement of results cannot be mass produced. School administrators need to involve people in their decisions and should not be rushed. A spirit of collaboration and team work is central to any kind of progress.

Mr. Yoo pointed out that

> Administrators need to have strong people skills and the ability to develop genuine relationships, to be trusted, respected, and consistent in order to be effective. All problems encountered in educational institutions could be solved if those involved kept in mind that student success was the ultimate goal to be achieved.

Finally, while emphasizing face-to-face aspects of their encounters, administrators viewed supportive relationships as necessary components of their administrative practice. Administrators drew on this narrative in recounting their experiences of collaborating with teachers, other professionals, and parents. The relationships were viewed as helpful avenues for administrators to share ideas, strategies, and philosophies and to realize both personal and organizational goals.

Relationships With Teachers

In the data, relationships with teachers varied and were mostly related to the resolution of the bullying cases. These cases, which were drawn from what the

administrators described as memorable moments in administrative practice, related to instances when administrators successfully dealt with difficult issues and collaborated with colleagues or teachers. These relationships underscored the administrators' role as problem solvers and their ability to address challenging administrative issues.

Mr. Xo, a school administrator with the Catholic School Board, narrated a relationship, unrelated to the bullying case, where he collaborated with his teachers on program development and program implementation related to Educational Quality Accountability Office (EQAO) assessment. Describing the resolution of the EQAO issue, Mr. Xo indicated that it took a lot of work and commitment on the part of everyone involved. He built the relationships through one-on-one consultations and regular meetings with teachers as the school undertook tasks such as comparing their EQAO results with those of other schools in their municipality; and comparing their EQAO results with other school boards in the GTA and with the overall results of schools across Ontario. Specifically, Mr. Xo indicated,

> I was able to work with the teachers in a way that the resolution removed the focus away from the student as the one who is underachieving. Instead, we focused on how teaching could be restructured so that teachers developed more activities and how we could increase time for students to practice skill sets needed to achieve desired EQAO results.

Mr. Xo commented on general relationships he cultivated with teachers:

> I collaborate with colleagues, deal with issues as they arise, and ask for colleagues' input in addressing daily issues. I find that if teachers bring forward and agree with solutions, they will consistently apply those solutions to address

> daily educational issues. Similarly, whether the issues involve students, programming, or professional development needs, I always try to involve teachers as a team, and avoid acting independently without consultation.

Mrs. Zee talked of having teachers informed of bullying occurrences or being asked to keep an eye on the situation because "I count on the teachers to be honest with me and to be on top of the situation, particularly when I consult them on an issue involving one of the students." Mrs. Zee commented on a meeting with teachers regarding her intent to visit a student's home in hopes of resolving that student's school behaviour problems:

> I was surprised that despite a general consensus that action was needed immediately, some teachers opposed the idea of meeting with this student's parents, arguing that it would not help since this student had serious behaviour problems. I guess it is one of those cases when I disagreed with some of my teachers regarding the best strategy to use to resolve a student behaviour problem.

A glimpse of Mr. Yoo's relationship with teachers was gleaned from his comments on the bullying case. Mr. Yoo wondered why a bullying incident may have gone on despite one of his teachers being made aware of the incident:

> I have good relationships with my teachers. The door to my office is always open for teachers to come and talk about any issues. I do not understand how a teacher was aware of this bullying case and didn't tell me. He should have come to me immediately considering that it had been reported more than once.

In sum, these administrator narratives indicated that administrators worked closely with the teachers when addressing teaching and learning issues, consulted the

teachers, and helped the teachers implement strategies intended to address incidents of bullying.

Relationships With Parents and Students

All administrators indicated that they had close interactions with the parents of students when addressing day-to-day problems involving students, advocating for resources, or requesting parent volunteers. Interactions with students were also mainly related to resolution of school issues. Focusing on their role in resolving conflicts, school administrators reported varying opinions on their interaction with students and the students' parents. Mr. Yoo, a school administrator with the Public School Board, indicated that he experienced memorable and rewarding interactions when parents originally thought of as being difficult, misguided, or misinformed could be made to share an initial concern, work with the school to develop a plan, and then share in the implementation of the plan of action. According to Mr. Yoo,

> The issue is not that these parents were difficult as individuals or that their concerns were not valid. It's just that they did not originally share a set of values educators held true—while this may seem to be an extreme example, there are often instances where parents originally thought of as adversarial become strong supporters of the school and contribute to having a difficult conflicting issue resolved in a true win-win fashion.

Mrs. Zee, a school administrator with the Public School Board, spoke of a case that took very long to resolve and where she had to deal with a student's parent. The case involved a student who was considered a troublemaker by teachers and was often reported to the office. According to the teachers, various strategies to stop this student

from being disruptive and disrespectful or to correct his behaviour had failed. Previous attempts by the school to involve this student's parents had failed. Mrs. Zee reported how she implemented a different strategy:

> I summoned the student to my office and told him that because his parents had not responded and his behaviour had not changed, I would go to his house and meet with the parents in a week or suspend him from school until his parents met with the school to discuss school concerns. I gave him a note to take to his parents indicating that I was flexible to meet over the weekend since they were not available to meet during the day. Needless to say, the threat worked. I met his family. Thereafter, parents became positively involved, and we all worked together to ensure the student's success.

Mr. Xo also gave an example of a bullying case where the student's parents were not cooperative. The problem took over a year to resolve.

Administrators indicated that a lot of their time was spent listening to questions, concerns, and complaints from students and parents. Most of the time spent on these relationships was used to reassure these various stakeholders that administrators would do their best to address the situations in an expeditious manner. These interactions with students or parents were viewed differently depending on the circumstance. For example, interactions and relations that administrators viewed as positive were in instances where issues were resolved quickly and parents or students understood their roles and took necessary actions to resolve the problems. However, irrespective of how the interactions were viewed, moral precepts as embedded in the School Code of Conduct or precepts embedded in normative social orientations were presented by administrators as the best

way to resolve the conflict. As such, administrator relationships and strategies were grounded in the normalization of positional power, and understood within existing meanings and constructs related to school administration. Explicitly, these relationships and meanings served as reference points and guided interactions.

Social Construction of Reality

Because bullying and social justice were key issues in the study, the narratives in this section focus on how administrators constructed these two concepts. The section also presents findings on how administrators constructed the various people involved in the bullying and how they constructed administrative roles. These constructs were gleaned from a cross-case analysis of the bullying incidents and explanations of administrative issues.

Bullying

Bullying was presented primarily as negative and unacceptable behaviours manifested as noncompliance with established school norms by students. Within this regard, bullying was explained by administrators as acts of physical and verbal aggression directed towards other students by an individual student or a group of students. As Mr. Yoo pointed out,

> Bullying is first and foremost a noncompliance issue with acceptable school rules that govern behaviours and student relations. Therefore, actions must be taken to stamp it out immediately. Bullying needs to be taken seriously by all involved, and we have to work hard to ensure that it does not happen in our schools.

Bullying as negative behaviour was presented in contrast with positive and/or desirable student behaviours. In this regard, administrators reported that a primary acceptable behaviour was students' adherence to the school code of conduct so that learning could

take place. Attendant acceptable behaviours, described as desirable qualities, were primarily used in reference to students who were experiencing bullying. These qualities included descriptors such as polite, great, focused on learning, good student, not a trouble-maker, quiet, and so forth. These positive behaviour attributes were contrasted with the effects of bullying, school expectations, practices in place to address negative social behaviours, and impacts of negative social behaviours on individuals experiencing bullying.

Referring to school behaviour expectations, Mr. Xo reported that "when a student comes to school, you expect them to follow rules. If they have not been taught to follow rules, then we have to teach them through modeling, acknowledging, and rewarding appropriate behaviour and correcting inappropriate behaviour." Mrs. Zee indicated that "these negative social behaviours don't just upset students experiencing bullying and those who witness it; they can derail learning opportunities."

Explanations provided by Mr. Xo regarding his actions and the impact of bullying on students also provided rich data that helped to clarify how he understood and constructed bullying. These explanations highlighted both the fundamental rights and correspondent responsibilities of individuals involved:

> Despite strategies implemented by the former administrator and by teachers, John continued to display antisocial behaviour. I cannot speculate about John's behaviour. He seemed to pick on students in lower grades probably because they are less powerful or do not have friends.
>
> In retrospect, John's behaviour was a classic progression of negative aggressive behaviours directed towards other students. It started with one student. By the time he left the school, so many people were impacted.

> John was not complying with teacher requests to refrain from bullying. John was simply not complying with school rules. Even in the classroom, John displayed negative behaviours. He was so aggressive towards other students and towards the teachers.

Linking negative behaviours of other students to bullying influences, two administrators presented students accused of bullying as being responsible for influencing other students to become bullies. Additionally, students with prior or existing behaviour problems were seen to possess a higher propensity to bully. As Mr. Yoo pointed out,

> Cathy was known to hang around and socialize with other students who have behaviour problems. They influence each other to bully and behave the same way. Otherwise, how can you explain these other girls acting as heavies and intimidating Jackie's younger sister?

Mr. Xo explained a similar situation: "John befriended a group of students. Those students were later accused of bullying."

In sum, bullying was presented as a behaviour issue that had a negative impact on students. Bullying was also presented as noncompliance with established school norms and manifested as aggressive behaviour towards others. These constructs situate bullying as a social relational behaviour problem.

Social Justice

When describing their understanding of social justice, administrators used language such as equity (Mr. Xo and Mrs. Zee); equitable distribution, action, and results (Mr. Xo); and fairness (Mr. Yoo). Mr. Xo, for example, constructed social justice in this way: "as educators we must ensure that our actions are fair and equitable. Also, the

results of our actions must ensure equitable outcomes for students. All individuals should be treated equally." In his interpretation of justice, Mr. Xo alluded to a difference principle when he spoke of instances where he had to "assess whether a student with autism should be held accountable to accepted school behaviours as other students." Furthermore, as Mr. Xo pointed out in the example of a student with autism,

> My primary consideration was that behaviour ideals as they relate to this student's basic conceptions around social cooperation may be unjust.
>
> I did not expect this student to undertake rational reflection of what is just or unjust to the same degree as other students. Therefore, my focus was to make sure that all students understood that individual needs, issues, and the desire to educate are the reasons behind any actions taken in relation to this student.

Mr. Yoo spoke of social justice as being about fairness. He explained that this meant a fair agreement of how students should relate to each other or benefit from the process of schooling without any distinctions whatsoever. Mr. Yoo argued that

> The expectations of a student are no different than those of a law abiding citizen, and it is [students'] right to know that justice was done or this small microcosm of society known as their school is no different than the world their parents live in.

Mr. Yoo was of the opinion that behaviour expectations outlined in the school code of conduct conveyed rational choice, moral principles, and binding rules of conduct. Mr. Yoo related this sentiment to his actions when addressing the bullying issue or other social justice issues:

> Justice must be done fairly and consistently. It must always be seen as being such, if it is to be credible and acceptable. Therefore, as an administrator, I must often

> work to see that my actions were seen as being without compromise. [Justice is about] the ability to see the good in all individuals and a desire to help them achieve the potential that lies within themselves.

Finally, Mrs. Zee spoke of social justice as being about equity. She clarified the foundational basis of this interpretation in this way:

> All students must be treated equitably. Any actions taken had to engender environments that promoted equal treatment. Each student must have equal access to all benefits and services; equal treatment in terms of quality of social interaction; and equal outcomes irrespective of their gender, ethnicity, and so forth.

All 3 administrators related their social justice interpretations to safety and security of students. This interpretation was succinctly captured by Mrs. Zee: "all students should learn in safe and secure environments and be free from threats of violence, intimidation, and prejudice."

In sum, the ways that the 3 administrators constructed social justice link social justice to a distributive paradigm. Some of the administrator constructs were also consistent with the Public School Board's interpretation of social justice as equity. Finally, school administrators relied on the school board, to varying degrees, to provide broad guidelines on what is considered equal distribution, appropriate actions, or results.

People

Administrators interacted with students, parents, teachers, and other administrators when resolving various school issues. These interactions took place mainly within the school setting and were narrated as one-on-one encounters between individuals—usually the administrator and either the student accused of bullying, the

student experiencing bullying, the teacher dealing with the issue of bullying, or the parent of the student either accused of bullying or experiencing bullying. The following section presents findings on how administrators constructed these actors.

Although the data included varied constructions of the students who were accused of bullying, these students were predominantly constructed in a negative light by administrators. These negative constructs were presented openly or in some cases embedded in contexts of challenges around compliance with school norms. Language embedded in administrator narratives portrayed these students as harmful, destructive, and deviant. The deviant behaviours were perceived as being directed towards fellow students, teachers, and those in authority by students who bully. Similarly, negative constructs were embedded in words such as bully, perpetrator, or instigator that were used by the administrator to describe these students. These words were used exclusively to describe students who disobeyed authority or disobeyed school rules.

Students accused of bullying were also constructed as students capable of corrupting other students and influencing them to act in a similar manner. In one particular instance, a student accused of bullying was described as having leadership qualities and thus influencing other students to participate in bullying activities. According to Mr. Xo, "[John] developed rapport with other students whose behaviour began to change. They became involved in bullying other students. [John] became a leader—and his group of friends was accused of bothering and teasing female students." In another case, a student was accused of influencing her friends to act as heavies and to intimidate a bullying target's sibling. Essentially, these constructs presented other students as innocent and vulnerable while students accused of bullying were constructed

as being responsible for disharmony by recruiting others to participate in the bullying or by being responsible for the misery of other students in school. This narrative of a villain role dominated bullying narratives presented by administrators.

Students accused of bullying were also constructed as victims. Victim language was used in reference to certain preconditions that made these students susceptible to bullying. These preconditions were attached to familial situations and administrator values. For instance, two of the administrators alleged that these students bullied because their parents were undergoing marital issues, used punitive or authoritarian styles of parenting, were single parents and not able to support them, or did not share similar values in education. Administrators used the word victim to convey that these students were in need of help to overcome their propensity to bully or to deal with their life circumstances. Thus, the victim construct implied unequal power relations, with the students accused of bullying having no control over circumstances in their lives that made them behave as they did. However, in their expressions, administrators deftly morphed in quick succession between what was acceptable and explainable and what were unacceptable or negative social behaviours.

In contrast, students experiencing bullying were described as good students by administrators. In generalized expressions, administrators constructed these students as individuals whose behaviours were normal or expected by using words such as excellent, high achiever, well behaved, quiet, and great. These constructs, which were typically related to student nonbullying behaviours and other school related activities, enabled these students to enjoy cordial relations with those in authority, provided convenient access to support, and set in motion administrator actions that facilitated respect,

protection, and encouragement. Administrators also spoke of students experiencing bullying as individuals in need of protection or as victims of students who bully. These students were characterized as quiet in comparison to students accused of bullying, who were loud and aggressive. In this meta-narrative, school administrators assigned a subordinate role, that of a victim, to the student experiencing bullying and presented the student who bullied as having superiority over this individual rather than as an equal.

Turning to constructs associated with parents in the bullying cases, parents of students accused of bullying featured prominently in administrator narratives while parents of students experiencing bullying were mentioned only in cases when they came to report incidents of bullying. The parents of students accused of bullying were sometimes presented by administrators as negative influences on the student. These negative constructs were linked to administrator perceptions that these parents were unsupportive, unable, or unwilling to work with the school to resolve issues. For example, Mr. Xo and his staff constructed John's parent as difficult, intimidating, and frightening by the way she advocated on behalf of her son. This construct positions this parent as possessing the same characteristics as the student accused of bullying.

Furthermore, parents of students accused of bullying were sometimes presented as a bad influence, unhelpful, unhappy, and bullies in their own rights. According to both Mr. Xo and Mr. Yoo, constructs around these parents being thought of as bullies, unhelpful, or a bad influence were related to their roles in the resolution of the bullying cases. Going a step further, Mr. Yoo posited that these parents are unhappy, arguing that

> They are misguided, misinformed, do not share a set of values educators hold true, will not value logical consequences and lack recognition of the importance

> of student achievements. As such, kids from these homes struggle or do not conform to school rules.
>
> They're focused on their personal situation instead of focusing on the issues their children are dealing with. As such they are of minimal help when difficult issues arise in schools. They want zero tolerance on school violence enforced as long as it is not their child who is the perpetrator.

Finally, constructs of parents of students accused of bullying were related to broader societal issues. For example, Mr. Xo constructed these parents as failing in their parental duties by not providing guidance to the student. This neglect of parental duty, however, was mitigated by what he described as marital issues and illness or poor health on the part of the parents.

A review of administrator expressions on bullying and social justice and how they constructed people involved in the bullying provided insights as to how these issues were understood. Bullying was seen primarily as a behaviour problem related to noncompliance with established norms. Additionally, administrator interpretations of social justice revolved around their expectation that all students should learn in environments that were safe, secure, and free from threats of violence, intimidation, and prejudice. Finally, on one hand, students accused of bullying were predominantly constructed as harmful, destructive, and deviant. These behaviour problems were also related to other broader social issues. On the other hand, negative constructs of parents of students accused of bullying were related to administrator perceptions that these parents were unwilling, unsupportive, or unable to work with the school to resolve the bullying issues.

Administrative Roles

School administrators play a central role in the management of educational institutions and in ensuring that students realize their learning goals. In this study, how administrators constructed their role was influenced by distinct expectations related to administrative practice competencies, knowledge, values, and actions. Specifically, an analysis of how the 3 administrators constructed their roles emphasized specialized functions as instructional leaders and as officers of the organization charged with enforcing organizational policies and maintaining order and discipline. Constructs of administrative roles were also related to values associated with behaviour traits and skills deemed important in their role as administrators. The following section presents these two meta-narratives.

In their specialized functions and role as officers of the organization, a predominant narrative identified in the study positioned administrators as the knights in shining armour: competent, knowledgeable, and caring administrators. This construct was fractured into multiple administrative roles. For example, in their specialized role as instructional leaders and as individuals tasked with ensuring good school-community relations, administrators spoke of supporting teachers and cultivating relationships with the various stakeholders. Specifically, Mr. Xo's description of the EQAO performance issue where he directly and indirectly influenced teaching and learning is one example of this specialized role. Another example of a specialized role related to promoting school-community relations can be gleaned from administrators' assertion that these relationships were crucial for administrative practice and resolving conflicts. Other aspects of this specialized role could also be gleaned from other key words such as: understanding

cultural and social contexts, understanding social ability, and responding to diverse community interests which emerged during discussions with administrators. Finally, Mrs. Zee spoke of her role as a caring administrator when she dealt with a student behaviour issue that was resolved successfully and the student's performance improved.

In their role as officers of the organization, administrators spoke of taking actions in order to ensure that the school environment was conducive to learning. For example, administrators spoke of taking actions to ensure that school expectations regarding student behaviours were conveyed to students and parents as well as taking appropriate action to reinforce accepted behaviours and compliance with school rules. Specifically, Mr. Xo's narrative of how he worked closely with the parents of a student accused of bullying speaks to both his specialized functions and his role as an officer of the institution charged with its management. Mr. Yoo's role in ensuring that school rules were followed and that his school, as a microcosm of society, held students to behaviour expectations as the rest of society also reinforces officer of the institution construct.

Constructs related to power and authority as officers of the institution also situated administrative practice in the centre of knowledge and expertise. For example, in the bullying cases, administrators presented themselves as the primary individuals charged by the school board with rescuing students experiencing bullying, reinforcing social norms, supporting teachers and parents, and ensuring compliance with school rules. This expectation involved not only conveying related policies, procedures, expectations, and consequences, but also taking action to correct deviant behaviours. Mr. Yoo's and Mrs. Zee's comments regarding being both the judge and jury and having to weigh options before taking action respectively speak to these administrators being

uniquely positioned to encourage and or reinforce normative behaviours in students, teachers, and parents.

Administrative constructs were embedded in both formal and informal expectations around behaviours traits and skills sets needed to manage educational institutions. In addition, value constructs were attached to various skill sets that administrators identified as crucial in administrative practice. According to administrators, the identified behaviours, skills and values were important for anchoring administrative practice on accepted norms of collegiality and ethics of professional practice. Mr. Xo gave examples of these skill sets, norms, and behaviours:

> School administrators need to have an open mind; be willing to devote time to resolving administrative issues; possess organizational and people skills; possess investigative skills in order to ensure their responses were not biased or ill-informed; and be devoted to serving teachers and students.

Furthermore, Mr. Xo added that

> Valuing equity and nurturing internal relationships (within education with teachers, students, the superintendent, etc.); external relationships (with agencies, businesses, churches, local government, other support services for students, university faculties of education, volunteers); and relationships with other professional groups (physicians, behaviour resource workers, psychologists, etc.) are important for resolving various administrative issues.

Similarly, Mr. Yoo indicated that a good administrator needed to

> Have a thorough knowledge of the Education Act and its associated legislation; have conflict mediation skills; have strong people skills, the ability to develop

genuine relationships, be trustworthy and respected; be patient; have good verbal communication skills; and possess the ability to see the good in all individuals and a desire to help individuals achieve the potential that lies within themselves. Mrs. Zee on the other hand talked of the importance of "having a thorough knowledge of the school system, familiarity with administrative practices and a willingness to make the tough calls" and of "valuing and engendering professionalism in daily practices and valuing diversity of stakeholders and diversity of opinions."

In sum, expectations and assumptions around discipline, shared values, and role as officers of the organization were important in how administrators constructed their roles, bullying, relationships, and social justice. Implicitly, how these administrators constructed administrative roles points to an understanding of administrative practice as a deliberate endeavour enacted to achieve desired goals. Second, the constructs highlight strategies to address the various educational issues and indicate that these strategies are spawned out of a need to ensure actions are not only effective in addressing educational issues, but that they are perceived as fair and equitable. Third, constructs around administrative roles emphasized unequal power relationships, with actions and expectations focused on reinforcing the role of the administrator as an officer of the institution.

Conclusion

Administrative practice narratives were produced through descriptions of the bullying cases, administrator actions, ethical dilemmas associated with the actions, and interpretation of social justice. These narratives highlighted one way administrators made social justice happen for students experiencing bullying in schools. Narrating these bullying cases provided administrators with the opportunity to reflect on how they dealt

with the issues while simultaneously highlighting intersecting inequities inherent in the phenomena of bullying.

The issue of bullying was useful in constructing how administrators understood social justice given that bullying may occur when individuals do not believe that the person being bullied is of equal status. Implicitly, bullying cases resulting from perceived differences in social status order are not only offensive to the dignity of individuals experiencing bullying, but are issues that have serious implications on the realization of just social arrangements. Therefore, administrator actions when resolving these bullying cases not only provided students who experience bullying with an opportunity to benefit from the process of schooling and to realize equal social relations, but also sanctioned socially acceptable behaviour and/or reinforced normative values that guide social relations. These findings are discussed in detail in chapter 5.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF STUDY FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore how administrators' ways of knowing, valuing, and relating influenced their understanding of social justice. This chapter discusses and analyzes the findings of the study. Recognizing the lack of space here for a detailed analysis of all constructs related to people involved in bullying, relationships, social justice, and administrative roles, the chapter endeavours to set apart frequent constructs and meanings attached to these aspects of administrative practice. Using bullying as an entry point, the chapter provides a summary of the study and analyzes how participants constructed people involved in bullying. A subsequent interpretive analysis explores how relational constructs and constructs associated with administrative roles, among other things, transform and reproduce reality as school administrators construct social justice. The chapter also presents implications of these findings for administrative practice and further research, and concludes by sharing the researcher's personal learning and thoughts.

Summary of the Study

This study was undertaken to explore the impact of social constructs on administrators' understanding of social justice. In addition to exploring how administrators' ways of knowing, valuing, and relating influenced their understanding of social justice, the study was also intended to initiate the kind of conversations that encourage school administrators to analyze how they negotiate and reconfigure dominant social justice narratives in their daily practice. This study, therefore, used an exploratory qualitative research methodology.

The study report was based on face-to-face interviews using open-ended questions with school administrators. Three school administrators from the GTA were interviewed—1 male from the Catholic School Board, 1 male from the Public School Board, and 1 female from the Public School Board. Interviews began with a general question regarding administrative practice. Follow-up questions focused on a critical incident concerning bullying, which had been identified by participants. The interview data were subjected to inductive thematic analysis, which yielded the following themes: (a) constructs of people involved in bullying, (b) relationships as fundamental to administrative practice, (c) administrative constructs, and (d) social justice constructs.

Study results indicated that social constructs were important in helping administrators understand, frame, and describe school administration issues. At the same time, administrators had to capture multiple relational behaviours, to relate their actions to school policies and procedures, and to ensure that their actions were perceived as fair and just. Specifically, general findings relative to the phenomenon of bullying indicated that constructs with both negative and positive connotations were used to describe actors involved in bullying. These constructs were important to how students were viewed and to how the administrators acted. For example, constructs with negative connotations were used to describe students accused of bullying. The descriptions portrayed these students as individuals who disregarded social etiquettes and rules, and who displayed this disregard in ways that often aroused negative emotions. As such, unfavourable characteristics were presented openly and embedded in a context of ongoing conflict, uncertainties about what worked, and challenges around demands for accountability.

Furthermore, relationships were deemed fundamental to administrative practice and an implicit connection made between the constructs used to describe students accused of bullying and these students' ability to follow rules. Some relations with the parents of students were described as difficult, unsupportive, unhelpful, and requiring a great deal of administrator intervention. Similarly, constructs with positive connotations were used to describe students who experienced bullying. The descriptions emphasized that students who were bullied were good students who obeyed rules. Relations with the parents of these students were also seen as crucial to administrator success. The positive description of these relationships conveyed the message that arising issues were resolved quickly, and indicated that these parents understood their roles in contributing to problem resolution.

Three other interesting findings also emerged. First, both the students accused of bullying and those experiencing bullying were portrayed as victims. For those bullied, the victim construct was related to school administrator perceptions that these individuals were passive and helpless. Therefore, administrators took action intended to protect them. For students accused of bullying, the victim construct was attached to social statuses. In the latter case, administrators believed that students who bullied were from social networks where bullying behaviours existed and that their bullying behaviours were never in isolation from their lived experiences. Implicitly, the choice of action reflected a disconnect with these students while highlighting that social status or membership in particular social groups was seen as a contributor to student involvement in bullying.

Second, administrative constructs were expressed as individual attributes and were tied to administrator responsibilities as implementers of organizational policy.

These administrative constructs were expressed in positive and dynamic terms, with the participants' choice of language between process types—action, events, values, and individual attributes—conveying a keen sense of understanding about their roles. For example, positive skill attributes such as competent, knowledgeable, caring, and decisive were presented as a demonstration of individual understanding of administrative roles and administrator possession of the right set of skills for the job. These administrative constructs highlighted institutional expectations, professional competence, and social responsibility that administrators adhered to in order to perform effectively. Therefore, these administrative constructs also represented images, beliefs, and values expected of individuals in positions of school leadership.

Third, administrators interpreted social justice as equitable distribution, action, and results; fairness; and equity. Generally, these understandings of social justice conveyed the intent to secure the kind of social relations that enabled individuals to enjoy greater equality within existing social arrangements. Constructs embedded in these social justice understandings also assumed common things such as universal acceptance of norms of social relations. For example, in cases of bullying, justice as equity or fairness constructs assumed that the Code of Conduct, educational policies, and operating procedures were universally accepted as reference norms. Additionally, other institutional instruments were believed to be socially just and deemed to have expressed sufficient ways of addressing and defining conflicting claims of justice for students experiencing bullying.

Discussion

The theoretical framework for this discussion is situated within critical approaches to discourse (as espoused by Fairclough, 1992, 1995; Foucault, 1969/1972;

Freire, 1970/1990; Luke, 1995; van Dijk, 1993) and the discursive nature of experience and relationships (as espoused by Fine & Weis, 2004; Fraser 1989; Young, 1990). In embracing this theoretical framework, the analysis uses deconstruction as a strategy for considering values that pervade administrative practice, for unraveling multiple meanings in administrator expressions, and for asking critical questions of how administrators construct their understanding of social justice. The analysis also pays attention to subordination and misrecognition associated with social status order, particularly where individual behaviours are perceived to be linked to social statuses (Gingrich, 2006).

Acknowledging that deconstruction is a term whose definition is fraught with challenges, even though it is connected to a set of philosophical claims about language and meaning, the use of deconstruction as a form of critique and strategy in this study is consistent with Derrida's assertion that deconstruction is not a system, but a strategic device for reading and interpreting texts and language (Balkin, 1996; Derrida, 1967/1976; Faulconer, 1998). Thus, the use of deconstruction to analyze the impact of social constructs on administrator understanding of social justice helps to unravel taken-for-granted ways of knowing.

The conceptual basis of this analysis is the assumption that administrators operate within knowledge regimes that are subject to influence, wherein individual actions involve a degree of interpretation, negotiation, and translation of meanings and knowledge. Consequently, deconstruction is used as a strategy for interrogating how knowledge regimes and subjective meaning associated with these regimes can privilege certain features of social life while suppressing or de-emphasizing others. The discussion also pays attention to terminologies that are privileged over others and terminologies that

are considered as the norm, valuable, important, or universal as they relate to people involved in bullying, social justice, administrative practice, and relationships (Balkin, 1996).

Constructing People Involved in Bullying

Constructs of people involved in bullying highlighted the role that bullying plays in reinforcing social inequality. Drawing on Cyba's (2006) definition of social inequality as "socially generated and stable restrictions of social groups" (p. 69) and her views that social inequality represents an unequal access to life chances, including the development of common attitudes and social identity within groups, constructs of people provided glimpses on how socially generated perceptions of individuals and groups were woven into bullying resolution. In this sense, three dimensions of inequality related to the phenomenon of bullying are of importance: First, inequality can be tied to bullying resolution wherein administrators may be unable or unwilling to impartially apply school rules, where they inconsistently apply school rules, and where they treat individuals or groups differently without any compelling reason. Second, inequality can be tied to experience of bullying wherein students who are accused of bullying, as part of a group bound by norms of schooling, do not desire or act upon accepted norms of social relations by bullying other students. Third, inequality can be tied to the possibility that individuals who experience bullying have internalized various identities or where their experiences of bullying "shape their realities and perceptions, forcing them to carve out identities" (Fine & Weis, 2004, p. 17) in relation to discursive practices that stratify.

The third dimension of social inequality also includes experiences of social inequality that result in what Gaskel and Levin (2008) refer to as possibilities of

alternative senses of identity, belonging, and engagement that may arise as a result of normalized patterns of interaction and meaning generated from social interaction. Furthermore, the consideration of inequality resulting from socially generated perceptions draws attention to Berger and Luckmann's (1966) argument that everyday reality is derived from and maintained by social interactions. Along the same lines, work by Lopez and Scott (2000) indicates that discursive formations contained in individual identities that emerge as a result of internalized patterns of interaction present unequal social relations as everyday reality and help individuals to understand institutional and relational structures that influence treatment of people. Similarly, George Herbert Mead's (1934) work suggests that the self is socially constructed and reconstructed through interactions which others. These works are important for comprehending how accepted patterns of interaction influence individual behaviour and actions. Implicitly, the study draws parallels between individual acceptance of inequality embedded in bullying to aspects of individual actions and identities that seem to perpetuate the same inequality as objective everyday reality.

Returning to the issue of how people were constructed by the study participants, the discussion starts with constructs of students involved in bullying. Entrenched in these constructs was language that labeled students as well behaved, quiet, excellent, bully, perpetrator, and instigator. Discernibly, positive labels were used to describe students who experienced bullying whereas negative labels were used to describe students accused of bullying. Specifically, positive constructs depicted students who experienced bullying as individuals possessing attributes and characteristics that surfaced above those of other typical students, including conveying that these students were amiable, not disruptive, nor

a threat to other students. Consequently, positive expressions appear to reflect administrator subjectivity, speak to school-appropriate behaviours, and represent value judgments or social constructs tied to student ability, personal responsibility, and judgment.

Conversely, constructs with negative connotations depicted students accused of bullying as perpetrators or instigators. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, an instigator is an individual who "spurs, incites, urges" (p. 97) whereas a perpetrator is one who "commits" an act (p. 140). A bully, on the other hand, refers to an individual who intimidates others through physical, verbal, or psychological means (Canadian Red Cross, 2006; Olweus, 1993). The special properties contained in these definitions presuppose the roles these individuals play and assume that students constructed as instigators are guilty of perpetrating bullying. Furthermore, non-meta information contained in the terms *perpetrator* or *instigator* represent discursive formations that affix prejudicial constructs and segregate students accused of bullying from the rest of the student population by confirming their guilt. Specifically, these students are seen as individuals who possess negative social values and are in turn accorded devalued status, an approach that, as Braithwaite (2000) indicates, "isolates him/her from the community, and punishes him/her for wrongdoing" (p. 137).

Braithwaite's (2000) work on bullying and restorative justice also points to the possibility that value judgments embedded in social bullying constructs "allow experiences, observations and aspirations to be connected in personally meaningful ways" (p. 121), impact how individuals who bully are constructed, and play an important role in how individuals interpret daily reality. Whilst there were constructs tied to actual

acts of bullying, there were also general constructs that could be interpreted to reflect other aspects of daily reality. For example, considering that students who experience bullying were constructed as good or bad students, there are distinct possibilities that value judgments embedded in these positive and negative social constructs are not only limited to bullying, but are linked to other school-appropriate behaviours and norms related to student performance, student responsibility in maintaining those norms, and choices students were expected to make. Accordingly, such value judgments seem to privilege behaviour characteristics that conform to societal expectations and highlight that individuals who follow rules are respected, supported, protected, and encouraged (Braithwaite, 2000). Thus, these social constructs are carefully chosen to depict individuals who display acceptable social qualities in a positive light and to highlight characteristics that are of value.

Although not classified as either a negative or positive construct, but equally important, was the use of the label *victim*. For students who experienced bullying, victim construct identified these individuals as victims of acts of bullying and as individuals in need of protection from students who bully. Victim constructs also highlighted forms of inequity embedded in the phenomenon of bullying by portraying bullying as a violation of norms of social relations. Here victimhood is understood from the perception that these individuals are weak, helpless, and unable to defend themselves against students who bully. Drawing parallels with a study on constructions of victims and perpetrators on television for women suggests that victimization is seen as a "personal issue between individuals rather than as a social problem" (Hernandez, 2006, p. 2). Therefore, when individuals are victimized because of perceptions of personal helplessness, weakness, or

inability to defend themselves, a logical explanation could be that a victim construct apportions blame for acts of bullying on perceived personal characteristics of students who experience bullying. Second, victim construct creates a general impression that individual behaviour is "in some way contributing to their victimization" (Fox & Boulton, 2003, p. 233). Third, assuming that individuals learn and internalize values, beliefs, and norms embedded in everyday lived experience, it is therefore possible to accept that a victim construct can help individuals make sense of their "relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across space and time, and possibilities of the future" (Norton, 2000, p. 5).

The use of the label *victim* to describe students who experience bullying raise possibilities that students may experience bullying because of being labeled as a victim. Specifically, individuals can develop perceptions of helplessness and passivity or accept that they will experience bullying because of beliefs of limited possibilities to stand up to individuals who bully. According to Hernandez (2006), identifying individuals as victims nurtures and legitimizes individuals' fear of victimization. In other words, because they are constructed as victims, emerging individual identities become intertwined with behaviour characteristics where their fear of victimization is the very reason they experience bullying. Therefore, while a victim construct appears expedient for identifying students who experience bullying, it reaffirms victimization based on perceived behaviours or identities rather than seeing opportunities presented in the phenomenon of bullying to challenge social systems that tend to bully those for whom violence is not foundational to their social identities (Fine & Weis, 2004). In addition, O'Moore (2000)

confirms that students who are labelled as victims may find their victim status difficult to reverse as others respond to them on the basis of their labels.

The label *victim* was also used to portray students accused of bullying as individuals who have acquired negative behaviour as a result of exposure to life situations deemed negative. Specifically, within the school environment, the victim construct assumes that when individuals locate themselves in relationships with others who bully, they became victims by emulating those behaviours or by generating meaning from observed behaviour. On the other hand, when the victim construct relates to perceived influence of family or external (to school) environments, individuals from social contexts where deviant behaviour thrives are victims because their actions are influenced by exposure to deviancy. As an example, individuals exposed to environments where negative parental interactions exist become victims because they are considered most likely to bully as a result of their exposure. Thus, exposure to bullying behaviours is seen to influence both perception and behaviour. This finding is consistent with Spriggs, Iannotti, Nansel, and Haynie's (2007) assertion that deviant affiliations are one among other social determinants of bullying. Studies by Baur et al. (2006) and Baldry (2003) point to family violence as a factor in bullying behaviour through the modeling of aggression and the establishment of proaggressive norms. Furthermore, Bandura (2002) posits that adolescents model their friends' behaviors, including aggressive behaviors. Consequently, individuals are constructed as victims because of suppositions made about the connections between membership in particular social groups and bullying perpetration.

Constructing individuals as victims portrays two types of victims: the ideal victim and the non-ideal victim (Hernandez, 2006). Students who experience bullying are

presented as ideal victims and are not viewed as perpetrators. Students who bully are presented as the non-ideal victim. For the non-ideal victim, perceptions of complicity and guilt are based on their status as individuals exposed to deviant behaviours, thereby suggesting that all individuals exposed to deviant behaviours tend to develop negative behaviours or that exposure to deviant behaviours is a determinant for involvement in deviancy. As such, non-ideal-victim constructs substitute individual actions, identities, life histories, and beliefs with assumptions related to exposure to deviancy. The non-ideal-victim constructs also reaffirm that membership in particular social groups can be judged and interpreted in ways that negatively impact individuals (Ryan & Rottman, 2007). Therefore, unless verified, victim constructs not only assume collective behaviour based on social labels but, according to Shelby (2004), can also represent irrational beliefs and render social institutions unjust for individuals, irrespective of established policies or procedures designed to engender equal social relations.

Focusing on social status and bullying complicity, various studies allude to a complex array of factors that influence individual involvement in bullying. Exploring additional factors related to family and social status, Spriggs et al. (2007) indicate that exposure to interparental conflict, physical punishment, low family cohesion, single-parent family structures, and family relationships are positively associated with bullying. Similarly, a study conducted in Australia by Ahmad and Smith (1994) indicates that, in addition to parental influence, personal behaviour characteristics and environment are possible reasons for individual involvement in bullying. In this analysis, these studies as well as contextualized narratives are important because they convey "overall definition of the situation, setting, and ongoing actions; participants in various communicative, social,

or institutional roles; and mental representations of valued goals, knowledge, opinions, attitudes and ideologies" (van Dijk, 2001, p. 356) that are deemed important for understanding the impact of social status on bullying complicity.

Results from this study identify social status as a dominant narrative when explaining contextual factors that influence bullying. However, assumptions of social status as an indicator of complicity in bullying, if not related to verifiable individual realities, contradict social justice concepts around fairness and equality by allocating blame based on stereotypical images of, for example, parenting styles, family situations, or social status. Relating this particular construct with discourses shaping images of people of colour, articulated by DeCuir and Dixon (2004), constructs tied to social statuses consequently imply that individuals with devalued statuses, such as single-parent families, are outsiders to the institution and inhabit an environment of constant and cumulative discrimination (Parker & Villalpando, 2007). Specifically, considerations that position these individuals as outsiders to institutional norms indicates that social status identifiers can be arbitrary labels intended to assign complicity and to perpetuate injustice in situations where individuals are segregated by virtue of particular social identities and where "certain groups are not accorded the same value" (Ryan & Rottman, 2007, p. 9).

Granted, bullying occurs within specific contexts, and individual behaviours may be influenced by environments and social interactions. However, social status as an indicator of bullying perpetration not only assigns blame but also assumes notions of deficiency and disadvantage. As an example, it could be possible that individuals from single-parent families are assigned blame because of beliefs that they have limited potential of taking action contrary to collective behaviours of other individuals with

similar statuses. If so, this could also suggest that these individuals are blamed because they possess devalued statuses. Therefore, there are nagging feelings that beliefs, attitudes, and personal experiences embedded in constructs related to social statuses might influence how individuals respond to particular issues. The discussion seems to boil down to the following: while social status is important in understanding bullying contexts, it is important to understand that it can also represent an arbitrary explanation of bullying complicity, and it can highlight subjective conditions for publicly sanctioned actions, including what Braithwaite (2000) refers to as notions of fairness and legitimate actions. Similarly, social status can influence how blame is apportioned to a social group, with little regard that bullying can be an individual act, and therefore only an individual should be blamed.

Relationships as Fundamental to Administrative Practice

The study revealed patterns of interactions that were deemed useful in discerning how values, ways of knowing, and life experiences influenced relationships; the significance school administrators placed on these relationships; and the impact of these relationships on bullying resolution. In the study, these relationships were established with teachers, parents of students involved in bullying, students, and other essential support networks in order to deal with bullying behaviour. The findings confirm Braithwaite's (2000) assertion that recommended practices for dealing with bullying in schools should reflect "inclusiveness of community in the process of acknowledging and making amends for wrongdoing and place importance on building and restoring positive relationships" (p. 122).

The study also revealed specific patterns of relationships that were classified as negative or positive relational constructs. Within these patterns of relationships, there was an implicit association made between positive relational constructs and the ability to follow rules and to display expected behaviours. Positive and negative relational constructs were expressed as an appreciation, or lack thereof, of norms of social relations. Furthermore, these relations were codified in institutional instruments that allowed administrators to enforce, correct, or motivate individuals to fulfill school demands. As an example, institutional instruments such as the School Code of Conduct provided clear guidelines on expectations to be followed in regards to bullying. Consequently, study results confirm that an underlying concept in these relational constructs was that administrator power, discursive practices, and established guidelines were inescapable facts that ensured relationships represented institutionalized constructs and expectations around norms of social relations (Bogotch, 2002; Bourdieu, 1999, as cited in Shields, 2004; Fairclough, 1989; Foucault, 1980; Gingrich, 2006; van Dijk, 2001).

Another dimension of relational constructs is the possibility that these relationships can be conceptualized as instruments of control. Assuming that administrators direct and dictate both the context and terms of relationships in bullying resolution, positive and negative relational constructs indicate a preference for the establishment of relationships of dominance and subordination. Implicitly, these relationships are important for helping administrators to take decisive action and to define expectations that people involved in bullying should hold about themselves, including their relationships with the rest of society, understood as "patterns of causal interconnection" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 3). As relations of control, these

constructs also place great emphasis on "establishing order" and "containing bullying" (Braithwaite, 2000, p. 137), and are aligned with institutionalized strategies for dealing with bullying. Finally, given that dominant discursive formations can shape both individual and societal perceptions, these constructs can promote institutionalized patterns of relationships (Gingrich, 2006) that allow individuals involved in bullying to realize either positive or negative interpersonal relationships.

Administrative Constructs

A wealth of literature exists on educational administration, much of which positions school administrators as key actors in educational institutions (e.g., Bogotch, 2002; Theoharis, 2007). Literature on leading for social justice indicates that administrators are expected to create environments that allow schools to deliver education's intended benefits to all students equally (Foster, 1989; Fullan, 2003). Oakes and Lipton (2003) also suggest that it is important for administrators to use a social justice framework in order to interrogate values, institutional practices, and inequalities that pervade social institutions. Finally, Hallinger and Leithwood (1996), who studied cognitive perspectives of educational administration, suggest that institutional structures and cultures affect beliefs and experiences of principals, their leadership, school processes, and school outcomes. These works are foundational to how administrative practice is constructed.

Results from this study confirm some of these influences. Specifically, study results revealed that administrative constructs were viewed as individualized practice and were tied to institutional expectations. For example, skills identified as possessed by administrators or necessary to accomplish tasks associated with the day-to-day

management of the school were deemed important for managing educational institutions. As a social construct, this focus emphasized individualized aspects of administrative practice that were tied to performance; commitment to organizational efficiency; and awareness of permitted actions and knowledge considered useful for realizing both personal and organizational objectives. In a similar vein, administrative constructs associated with perceptions that possession of the right sets of skills were important aspects of school leadership indicated that institutionally mandated values, knowledge base, and actions expected of administrators influenced how administrators perceived their role. These findings corroborate Ryan and Rottman's (2007) assertion that administrative practice is considerably tempered by institutional structures that define possibilities and limit actions.

By speaking of the importance of being perceived as fair when addressing social justice issues or other school issues, administrators made clear linkages between social justice and individualized concepts of administrative practice. However, the results are ambiguous on how specific constructs around fairness and individualized practice were intertwined, other than through role expectations placed on administrators. This finding contradicts Ryan and Rottman's (2007) assertion that the "practice of individualistic leadership is not always consistent with social justice" (p. 16). Additionally, assuming that school administrators possess a clear understanding of their role, permitted actions as well as the limitations on personal actions, this finding is contradictory to Cranston, Ehrich, and Kimber's (2005) claim that meanings associated with individualistic leadership make it difficult to distinguish aspects of administrative practice that are institutional in nature and aspects that are personal and subjective in nature. Therefore,

given these contradictions, it is useful to reevaluate this finding in light of Bourdieu's (2004) and Henkin's (1998) contention that constructing administrative practices as individualized practice can perpetuate the illusion of rationality and reproduce unequal power structures.

Ideas of school administrators as having ultimate responsibility for their schools were also gleaned from the study. These ideas were tied to administrator understanding of institutional and positional power vested in the position of the administrator. It follows, therefore, that administrator use of strategies at their disposal, including their positional power to resolve bullying, constituted acceptance of constructs related to their roles as officers of the institution. This acceptance of institutional constructs ultimately affects both choices of action and individual understanding of responsibility for maintaining order. For example, the use of positional power to establish and reinforce institutional norms, to punish individuals who do not conform, and to communicate that certain behaviours (such as bullying) were unacceptable confirms that administrator understanding of their role is influenced by institutional responsibility for maintaining order as well as discursive practices advocating the use of power to resolve contradictions (Anderson, 1990) and social justice narratives that are intended to regulate behaviours, practices, and relations (Rawls, 1971).

Overall, constructs that influence administrative practice were related to daily decisions, institutional expectations, individual assumptions of roles and responsibilities, and skill sets needed to be effective as officers of the institution. Consequently, administrative practice was viewed as individualized practice, even though intimately

linked to institutional expectations and discursive practices related to school leadership and social justice.

Concepts of Social Justice

Various authors have attempted to define social justice. These definitions range from social justice understandings centered on disrupting and subverting social arrangements that marginalize individuals (Gerwitz, 1998); understandings that underscore "inherent human rights of equality, equity and fairness" (Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002, p. 162); understandings related to equal distribution of resources, responsibilities, and opportunities arising from social cooperation (Barry, 1989; Miller, 1999; Rawls, 1971); understandings of social justice as a "concern with the principles and norms of social organizations and relationships necessary to achieve, and act upon, equal consideration of all people in their commonalities and difference" (Gewirtz & Cribb, 2003, p. 18); understandings that advocate politics of difference (Young, 1990); and understandings related to both recognition and distribution (Fraser & Honneth, 2003).

In this study, school administrators interpreted social justice as equity; fairness; and equitable distribution, action, and results. Starting with social justice as equity concepts, Rawls (1971) indicates that an understanding of social justice as equity assumes that individuals are bound by the same rules even though they are free and rational beings concerned with furthering their own interests. This understanding of social justice, as articulated in Rawls's (1971) distributive justice, is influenced by knowledge regimes that assume individuals in society have accepted a position of equality that defines the fundamental terms of their relationships. As a key reference norm, justice as equity concepts imply that school administrators view the school

community (students, their families, teachers, and society members) as subjects who have accepted all relevant terms and consequences of their relationships, and are aware of what would be considered fair action as well as norms of social relations that they are expected to abide by (Rawls, 1971), such as those contained in the School Code of Conduct or equity policies.

With its subject approach, justice as equity also stresses the prudent reality of institutionally regulated behaviour and prescribes behaviour norms based on assumptions that individuals understand these expectations. At the same time, because individuals are believed to have equal needs and rights and social institutions are believed to provide equal opportunities for equal access to resources (Barry, 2005), another inferred assumption is that this concept of social justice is influenced by individual entitlement to equal access to opportunities (Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002). Not surprisingly, individuals who do not conform are considered deviant because, in the Rawlsian view, by virtue of their subject status, they are assumed to have willingly accepted the norms and the institutionally sanctioned corrective actions.

Given that justice as equity concepts are built around institutionally sanctioned social norms, its implementation relies upon a common institutional framework (Gale, 2000). In bullying resolution, this reliance on a common institutional framework means that the criterion for application of this principle of justice is influenced by liberal democratic concepts founded on the premise that because a majority of students abide by the same rules, then the rules are universally acceptable and that institutional corrective actions are justifiable. However, because this conception of social justice is tailored to the needs of the majority, Lopez (2003) contends that justice as equity can be viewed as

difference neutral because it promotes ideas that social justice can be delivered without substantially recognizing and altering the privilege enjoyed by dominant groups. Similarly, Ryan and Rottman (2007) point out that such an approach to justice can reinforce existing inequalities by treating everyone the same.

In summary, justice as equity constructs appear to be influenced by Rawls's (1971) concepts of social justice, particularly those that focus on the development of social relations where individuals contribute to a common good, and where institutional conditions, aims, wants, and norms result in just and equitable societies. Within educational institutions, this concept of social justice is also influenced by constructs that focus on student ability to benefit equitably from the process of schooling. Accordingly, administrator understanding of justice as equity is related to both individual intent to reinforce "social and altruistic motivation" (Rawls, 1971, p. 281) and to ensure just outcomes. Equally, this concept of social justice underscores institutional constructs that influence role expectations, which according to Furman and Shields (2005), Rusch (2004), and Young (1990) can perpetuate invisible privilege fostered in recursive power–knowledge relationships and in institutional contexts that systematically disadvantage some groups.

Turning to justice as fairness constructs and foregrounding a concern with terminologies, the analysis focuses on perspectives advocating that individuals should be treated the same or perspectives that are consistent with liberal democratic values (Dei & Karumanchery, 2001). For example, school administrators used the term *fairness* to describe their understanding of social justice and to refer to actions taken to resolve bullying. This understanding is grounded on individual experience and perception of

justice as fairness, assumptions that students have the same needs to social goods, and institutional expectations related to administrative roles. Specifically, justice as fairness was expressed in ways indicating that school administrators intended to be perceived as fair and to fulfill institutional responsibility to treat all students fairly. Consequently, justice as fairness is closely related to Rawls's (1971) distributive model infused with individual experience and perception of justice as fairness in order to affirm equal treatment and protection, and to engender relationships that allow for equal treatment of individuals. This finding is consistent with Gale's (2000) assertion that a focus on both the experience and the perception of fairness indicates a strong relationship with the distributive model and with concepts of social justice where individuals are deemed to have the same needs in regards to social goods.

Also important to the analysis are social justice interpretations influenced by recognition and retributive models of justice (Sen, 1980; Young, 1990). For example, administrator application of the difference principle, grounded in Young's recognition paradigm, conveyed concern for a student considered least advantaged by prescribing what would be acceptable inequality based on what this individual was able to do and to be. Accordingly, this understanding of social justice is influenced by discursive practices asserting that social justice must interrogate social processes, institutional structures, and cultural politics that disadvantage individuals, such as Young's (1990) paradigm. Similarly, this understanding of social justice "distinguishes itself as a critical approach to social justice, which differs in important respects from classical liberal perspectives" (Ryan & Rottman, 2007, p. 11).

In the difference principle, the attainment of social justice is based on differential distribution of social and material goods (Gale, 2000). Accordingly, of concern are social practices that prescribe equal behaviour norms despite individual capabilities or practices that depict individuals (e.g., those with autism) as disadvantaged and assume they need protection from taken-for-granted behaviour norms. As a result, discursive formations hypothesizing that injustice can arise because certain groups or individuals are not accorded the same value as others, such as those by Fraser and Honneth (2003), Ryan and Rottman (2007), and Young (1990), influence this social justice construct. Similarly, according to Kompridis (2007), the application of the difference principle suggests that externally manifest and publicly verifiable experiences are viewed as objective, valid, and plausible reference points for a social justice conception. For example, this interpretation of social justice was guided by the consideration that, for the student with autism, sentiments regarding norms of social relations may not have been sufficiently formed and so they could not be expected to act justly or to follow the school Code of Conduct to the letter. Consequently, the finding confirms that certain social justice concepts, such as those influenced by Young's (1990) and Sen's (1980) recognition and retributive models, can indeed disrupt normative narratives that disregard how individuals understand and interpret social situations, including fair terms of social cooperation.

Positioning ability or capability as a genuine criterion for the student with autism also represents a transformative agenda endorsed by recognition paradigm and the principle of equality of retributive justice (Sen, 1980). Implicitly, students with autism need to be protected because their preferences and actions are distorted as a result of

underdeveloped abilities related to reason, senses, emotions, affiliation, imagination, and thought. Consequently, this understanding of social justice incorporates ability and entitlement constructs in order to address inherent unequal social relations founded on fixed natural characteristics. On one hand, these results confirm Gerwitz and Cribb's (2003) and Sen's (1980) assertion that individuals must contemplate other interpretations of social justice. The results also confirm that one can extend the Rawlsian theory of distributive justice to its associational aspects in order to alter norms of social relationships in ways that consider individuals in their commonalities and difference. On the other hand, these results confirm that ability as a criterion for justice can address what Gale (2000) and Young (1990) view as injustice that is embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols or as a result of social justice being reduced to issues of (re)distribution alone.

Overall, study findings reaffirm that even for a small group, a wide range of social justice understandings exist (McKenzie, et al., 2008) and "not only is the very notion of social justice a contested one, but it seems to co-exist with a range of ideas and expressions about equality, fairness and human rights" (McInerney, 2004, p. 2). Similarly, while equity, fairness, and equal distribution are easily understood concepts of social justice in educational institutions, these interpretations confirm in part that the practice of social justice is driven by a subjective framework. Finally, study findings suggest that social justice practices are employed mainly at an individual level, with little thought put into the aspects of institutional structures that influence discursive formations and shape experience and actions; into institutional structures that are devoid of situational, interpersonal and developmental cues (Bourdieu, 2000); or simply that as a

human construction, social justice is inherently value laden (Furman & Gruenewald, 2004).

Implications

The study examined the impact of social constructs on school administrator understanding of social justice. Participants indicated various ways that they interpreted social justice. These understandings were influenced by constructs that helped school administrators frame their practice; even though the extent to which specific constructs informed, rationalized, and affected their understanding of social justice is unknown. Based on these study findings, two major implications to administrative practice were identified related to their understanding of social justice. There were also implications related to how people involved in bullying were constructed.

The first implication is related to how school administrators interpreted social justice. In the study, social justice was positioned within distribution, recognition, and retribution paradigms. These understandings confirmed that school administrators "draw from various individual, social and institutional contexts to read meaning into situations they must interpret" (Evans, 2007, p. 162). Consequently, these findings highlight the need for school administrators to interrogate their systems of meanings. One possibility for integrating systems of meaning is to adopt a critical approach to personal, institutional, and societal commonplace assumptions. A framework proposed by Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) for constructing and deconstructing literature, but one which can be relevant for school administrators, involves implementing a praxis of critical reflection and action. If implemented into administrative practices and training programs, this framework could encourage school administrators to re-think their values

regarding knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to social justice. Specifically, practicing school administrators could implement a process that allows them to consider the following: (a) how to disrupt commonplace assumptions, (b) interrogate and/or incorporate multiple viewpoints, (c) include a social–political lens in issue analysis, and (d) ensure actions promote social justice. This way, school administrators will document how they construct and define social justice, as well as how their dispositions, values, and knowledge impact their understanding of social justice

The second implication is related to the various administrator interpretations of social justice. These study findings confirm that social justice orientations can be embedded in discourses which are historically and culturally constituted (McInerney, 2004). Given these diverse understandings of social justice and possible influences of historical and cultural constructs, it is crucial for school administrators to regularly review their understanding of social justice either formally or informally. For example, school administrators can review their understanding by soliciting feedback from peers or communities of practice through one-on-one meetings, regularly scheduled information sharing activities, or professional development activities. This review and/or feedback process will provide school administrators with an opportunity to engage in dialogue on social justice issues in ways that consider various conceptual frameworks; contribute to building professional consensus around the issue of social justice; consider the impact of social constructs on their conceptual frameworks; and identify broad categories of constructs that are emphasized or deemphasized in aspects of individual and collective understandings of social justice. The result of this review would be a clear and collective

understanding of social justice that links social constructs to how they theorize leading for social justice.

In constructs related to people involved in bullying, social status was presented as an indicator for involvement in deviancy. This finding has important implications for school administrators. Specifically, when social status is seen as an indicator of complicity in bullying, inherent collective guilt is prescribed to individual acts. Therefore, to minimize the impact of this construct on administrator understanding of social justice, it is important for school administrators to construct social status primarily as a cognitive area of both personal and situational factors that influence an individual's decision to bully. It is equally important for them to ensure that their actions are related to facts as presented and not individual subjective interpretation of social realities. From administrative practice perspectives, educational institutions should develop and implement objective criteria, accompanied by institutional directives that are legally binding, that school administrators can use to interrogate how constructs related to social statuses influence resolution of complex educational issues. An example of this would be codes of conduct specific to social justice developed by educational institutions to address cases where individual subjectivity outweigh objective concerns for the students and explicit expectations for school administrators to consult a neutral third party or commit to reorienting themselves regarding evaluations of different statuses. A second example would involve utilizing existing mechanisms, such as Human Rights Legislation and other Charter Rights to address bullying in ways that minimize possibilities of injustice inherent in individual subjectivity.

Findings from this study, consistent with other studies, suggest the following: First, relations of social inequality embedded in victim construct could be both explainable and excusable, depending on an individual's life circumstance. Second, failure to adhere to school behaviour expectations can be blamed on "unjust and impoverished social circumstance" (Rawls, 1971, p. 506). And third, a prescribed role expectation can contribute to victimization. However, given that individuals "shape their meaning and are shaped by them" (De Lawter & Sosin, 2000, p. 8), this finding provides support to studies that discourage victim labels and studies asserting that individual actions can be influenced by meanings generated in social contexts and everyday discursive practices. Consequently, in order to engender equal social relations, it is crucial for school administrators to revise and remove documents such as policies, codes of conduct, and implementation guides that use language that label individuals involved in bullying as victims, perpetrators, instigators, and so forth. This change will lead to an environment where labels have no meaning and where documents used to address issues such as bullying reflect attention to individual contexts, relationships, and actions.

Finally, study results also suggest that, as individuals negotiate and reconfigure dominant narratives in daily activities, they often emphasize certain features of social life while de-emphasizing others. It is important to ensure a theoretical integration between social justice and social constructs, particularly for individuals whose role expectations include the delivery of social justice. This type of theoretical integration should incorporate activities that undertake periodic reviews of current educational issues and analyze constructs that influence day-to-day decisions of school administrators. It should also include expectations that school administrators are involved in learning communities

so as to further their commitment to social justice and spawn the development of broad-based knowledge on issues that are important to the school community.

In summary, the implications for administrative practice will entail administrator commitment to participate in learning activities and self-reflection; soliciting peer feedback; and integrating social justice theory, social constructs, and administrative practice in ways that pay attention to how values, beliefs, and knowledge impact their understanding of social justice.

Personal Learning

When I embarked on my studies in the Master of Education program, I was sure of what I knew, what I wanted my thesis to be about, and length of time it would take me to finish my studies. In fact, I believed I was even sure of the results I would find in my study. However, the more courses I took, the more I realized that I knew very little and started to doubt if I knew enough to successfully complete my studies. This feeling of inadequacy was more pronounced when I started working on my thesis and has persisted to this stage. Also, having spent over 15 years administering training programs and over 20 years talking about social justice, human rights, and equity, I realized that what I knew of those subjects was probably equivalent to a drop of water in an ocean. Therefore, I was left wondering if I really knew those subjects at all, if I would ever have what I would consider adequate knowledge, or how my lack of expert knowledge was perceived, particularly when I made absolute pronouncements about issues I now realized I knew very little about.

During the program, I found the initial pace relatively easy, enjoyable, and to some extent predictable. I was able to complete the required coursework in a relatively

short time, except for the few times I forgot to register for a course and had to wait out a semester. However, when I started working on this thesis, I had not anticipated the impact of not having a regular schedule and the ease with which my school work could easily fall off the radar. As a result, I have struggled, have been inconsistent, and have often wondered if I would ever finish. For example, it took me about a year to analyze my study data and to write chapter 4. Of course I had the usual excuse of a busy family life and work schedule. Because I was unfocused, I found chapter 4 the most difficult to write. Part of this difficulty was related to lack of simple report-writing skills, although I had assumed I possessed excellent skills, until then. For example, the chapter required me to report the findings without any discussion whatsoever while I had always included my two cents worth even when it was not required. While there was very little I could do without relearning simple report-writing skills, if I could redo the experience and reduce the length of time it took me to write this chapter, I may be tempted to write chapter 4 even before tackling chapters 1, 2, and 3.

Challenges with the thesis aside, participation in the Master of Education program has opened up a world of knowledge that I would not have uncovered. I exit the program acknowledging that what I have learned represents the tip of an iceberg of knowledge, with so many other viewpoints yet to be discovered. In other words, the new knowledge reflects a narrow window through which I allow myself to see the world, is intended to convey subjective lived experiences, and is expected to help illuminate opportunities for deepening understanding of the circumstances and issues that rouse passion and concern in society. Finally, this journey of discovery was not possible without academic and

personal support. I was privileged to have individuals whose strengths carried me through the challenging times, even when I least suspected.

Final Thoughts

The study provides a glimpse into how social constructs influence administrator understanding of social justice and has important implications for school administrators. However, this study is not exhaustive, in the sense that it does not explore all possible social constructs that would impact administrator understanding of social justice.

In addition, three other points are worth reiterating. First, given the contestability of terminologies associated with social justice and the discursive nature of administrative practice, it is important to remember that various interpretations exist related to both social justice and administrative practice. In fact, the explored interpretations of social justice, including constructs related to administrative practice, only present opportunities to deepen individual understanding and to confirm inherent contradictions.

Second, whilst constructs related to distributive, retributive, and recognition models of social justice, as well as victimization, social status, and administrative practices, among others, impact administrator understanding of social justice, various limitations related to sample size and study questions preclude generalization of these results. The study, as undertaken, is not representative of all possible scenarios where school administrators are called upon to interpret their understanding of social justice.

Finally, in order to draw general conclusions, additional research needs to be undertaken. This research should be grounded in specific and comprehensive realities of a large number of individuals and integrated within existing discourses on social justice, leadership, and education.

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Appendix A

Interview Structure

IMPACT OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTS ON ADMINISTRATOR UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Master of Education Study

Interview Structure

Immediately following the interview script:

This formal part of the interview contains 6 questions; however, I may ask supplementary questions for clarification. The questions are not in any order of importance and are not intended to be evaluative. If there are any questions that you are unwilling to answer, please feel free to decline to respond to those questions. **If you do not have any questions for me and if you feel ready to begin, we will proceed with the interview.**

1. Please take a moment to reflect on your experiences as a school principal and on your administrative practice. What stands out in your mind as being some memorable moments, major AHAs, and/or big lessons for you as a school administrator?
2. Choose a specific example of a case where you had to deal with an incident where a student was experiencing bullying and harassment. Could you please describe the incident and talk about what you saw as the big issue(s) or concern(s)? (probe for (un)acceptable actions, how/who determines what is (un)acceptable and patterns of representation and relations)
3. Focusing on the incident you just described, what did you do to resolve the issue? What influenced your choice of action? (probe for sense of agency and discretion, personal vs. institutional values and patterns of obligation)

4. Once again, reflecting on the incident that you have just described, are there any dilemmas that may be associated with the choice of action? (probe for ethical considerations, probe for values that influence decision making and patterns of representation).
5. My fifth question focuses on social justice interpretations. Let's go back to your choice of action in this particular incident. Based on the actions you took to resolve this issue, how would you summarize your interpretation or understanding of social justice? Are there other times when you would interpret social justice differently? If yes, please give examples (probe for different social justice paradigms/other understandings, when, where and why particular understandings are applicable).
6. My final question is related to administrator skill-sets/desirable qualities. In your opinion, what type of knowledge base, values and relationships do administrators need to cultivate in order to address complex issues related to social justice in schools? (probe for patterns of interaction and social constructs/accepted ways of knowing related to race, class, gender and status/socio-economic etc.)

Concluding comments:

We have reached the end of the interview. Do you have any other questions or would you like to share additional thoughts?

If you have no questions or additional thoughts, I will send to you transcripts from this meeting immediately after I have transcribed them for you to review and to confirm accuracy of the information before I conduct data analysis. We can then speak if you have any concerns or if there is need for further clarification.

Once again, thank you for agreeing to be a key informant in this study. Your insights will be of benefit to other administrators facing similar situations.

Appendix B

Brock University
Office of Research Services
Research Ethics Office
St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada L2S 3A1
T: 905-688-5550, Ext. 3035/4876 F: 905-688-0748
www.brocku.ca

DATE: August 29, 2007

FROM: Linda Rose-Krasnor, Acting Chair
Research Ethics Board (REB)

TO: Coral Mitchell, Education
Perez OYUGI

FILE: 07-032 OYUGI

TITLE: Impact of Social Constructs on Administrator Understanding of Social Justice

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The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.

DECISION: Accepted as Clarified

This project has received ethics clearance for the period of August 29, 2007 to April 15, 2008 subject to full REB ratification at the Research Ethics Board's next scheduled meeting. The clearance period may be extended upon request. ***The study may now proceed.***

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and cleared by the REB. During the course of research no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment, or consent form may be initiated without prior written clearance from the REB. The Board must provide clearance for any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/forms to complete the appropriate form **Revision or Modification to an Ongoing Application.**

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored. A Final Report is required for all projects upon completion of the project. Researchers with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research Services will contact you when this form ***Continuing Review/Final Report*** is required.

Please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence.

LRK/bb